

L'art pour l'art or l'art pour la vie?

An Analysis of the Historical Avant-Garde Manifestos

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I declare that the following thesis, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, has been composed by myself, Katherine N. Judah, and is entirely my own work except where due acknowledgement is made. No part of this work has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification at any other institution.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the European Avant-Garde manifestos of the early twentieth century. The goal of this work is to determine, from an analysis of this primary material, the intentions of the historical avant-garde with regard to the autonomy of art. In accordance with the European Avant-Garde International Research Project coordinated by the University of Edinburgh, this thesis attempts to review the framework for study of the avant-garde established by Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of 1974.

The manifestos selected for examination belong to the movements of German Expressionism, French Cubism, Italian Futurism, the Russian avant-garde, Dadaism and Surrealism. This range covers all those movements that Bürger labels the “historical avant-garde”. Whilst, in formulating a theory of avant-gardist intention, Bürger focuses on Dadaism, early Surrealism and the Russian avant-garde “after the October revolution,” this work aims to reformulate Bürger’s theory so that it may be applied equally to all movements of the historical avant-garde.

In addition to establishing the intention of the avant-garde movements towards art’s relationship to the social and political world, this thesis attempts to identify the extra-aesthetic implications of such objectives. Whether the movements were heralding a revolutionary doctrine of *l’art pour la vie* in line with Bürger’s theory, the traditional doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*, or were merely an instinctive reaction to advances in technology, their designs arguably impacted upon the direction taken by society and politics. The critical social theories of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas are examined with respect to this extra-aesthetic impact.

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INTRODUCTION

(i) Context of Research

The catalyst for this piece of research is the work of Peter Bürger, formulated over thirty years ago in his influential book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. The work attempts for the first time, in the wake of Renato Poggioli's 1960s book of the same name, to assess the European artistic avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s and thereby to create a framework within which study of the early twentieth-century avant-garde can be organised and its artistic production categorised. There is a contemporary notion that Bürger's theory is far too confining and ideologically constricting, and that the once ground-breaking work contains some serious shortfalls. Bürger focuses largely on the works of Dadaism and early Surrealism as well as those of the Russian avant-garde in the wake of the October Revolution. As a result, the manifestations of French Cubism, Italian Futurism, German Expressionism and the pre-revolution Russian avant-garde – fundamental and foundational movements of the historical avant-garde – are largely sidelined, if not altogether sidestepped.

Bürger defines the European avant-garde in terms of a “unified intention” or “common ideological orientation” (Scheunemann, “Prolegomena” 15). Bürger's idea is that it is with the historical avant-garde movements that the social “subsystem” of art progresses from the modernist aestheticist stage of “system-immanent criticism” to that of “self-criticism” (Bürger 21).¹ In other words, the avant-garde turns against the autonomous status of art in institutionalised bourgeois society as a result of the link between autonomy and an absence of any social consequences. Bürger describes the “progressive detachment of art from real life contexts” in bourgeois society and the “correlative crystallization of a distinctive sphere of experience, i.e., the aesthetic” (23). Thus, according to Bürger, it is the intention of the avant-gardist protest to “reintegrate art into the praxis of life”; that is, to integrate the aesthetic sphere back into that of the social and the political, thereby putting an end to the autonomous and somewhat benign status of art (22). Bürger

¹ The concept of the “historical avant-garde” is used by Bürger to distinguish the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century from the neo-avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 60s.

speaks of the force that emanates from the substance of individual works of art, which “aims at eradicating the distance between [art]work and the praxis of life” (25). In its most “extreme manifestations,” the avant-garde is said to attempt such a reintegration via an active attack on the institution of art as it has evolved in bourgeois society (109, fn. 4). The concept of “art as an institution” is used here to refer to “the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas of art that prevail at a given time and determine the reception of works” (22). Bürger’s ultimate conclusion is that the avant-gardist attempt to “sublate” art was a “failure” (53). The term “sublation” is used in the Hegelian sense of the term. In other words, “art was not simply to be destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form” (49).

Many critics do not accept the proposed failure of the avant-garde, and are thus of the opinion that the basic assumption of Bürger’s theory is highly problematic. As Bürger himself puts it, his book has provoked “intense discussion and occasional vigorous attack” (95). The two main compilations of responses to Bürger’s work are Martin Lüdke’s *Theorie der Avantgarde: Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (“Theory of the Avant-Garde: Answers to Peter Bürger’s determination of Art and Civil Society”) published in 1976, and Dietrich Scheunemann’s *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives* published in 2000. As representative of contemporary criticism, I will take the work of Dietrich Scheunemann, which has been formulated as a critique of Bürger’s theory; in particular, of its basic assumption that the avant-garde intended to reintegrate art into “life”.² Scheunemann feels Bürger is far too selective in the choice of material that he uses to come to such a conclusion, finding that an examination of a wider range of material throws Bürger’s theory into question. In his seminal essay, “On Photography and Painting. Prolegomena to a New Theory of the Avant-Garde,” Scheunemann takes as an alternative basic assumption the idea that “not one common intention i.e. the intention of reintegrating art into the practice

² Whenever “life” is referred to in the abstract, it should be understood to mean the “praxis of life,” that is, practical life contexts such as the political and the social as distinct from ideal life contexts such as the aesthetic, the intellectual, or the spiritual (see Bürger 22-23). However, it should not be taken to mean the praxis of the “means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday” which the avant-gardists are very much trying to reject (Bürger 49). Bürger believes the avant-garde wanted to alter “the way art functions in society” rather than its content, and to thereby “organize a new life praxis from a basis in art” (49).

of life, but a common challenge caused the avant-gardist storm in the arts world, the challenge that the advances of new technical media, in particular photography and film, posed to traditional art forms and the traditional understanding of art” (16). Scheunemann does not believe that the abolition of autonomous art via its integration with life was an issue for the avant-garde artist. He writes that “painters as well as writers showed little concern for the idiosyncrasies of aestheticism and the question of the autonomous status of bourgeois art in their comments” (19). The notion is that the provocative nature of the work of the historical avant-garde is representative not of reactions against the impotence of autonomous art, but rather of reflections upon “the place which artistic production can hold in an age in which industrialisation and technological processes rapidly gained ground in all other realms of life” (16).

Scheunemann adopts the “materialist explanatory scheme” of Walter Benjamin – which will be summarised presently – whilst Bürger defines the avant-garde more in terms of its ideological motivations. Bürger acknowledges Benjamin’s thesis, that is, he does not deny the significance of the development of techniques of reproduction for the development of art, yet he believes that “the decisive turn in the development of art in bourgeois society must not be traced monocausally to the development of technical production techniques” (32). Likewise, Scheunemann does not believe the change in the development of art should only be attributed to the intention to abolish art’s autonomous status by reintegrating it into the praxis of life, since such concern with aestheticism was minimal (19). It seems that both Bürger and Scheunemann acknowledge the existence of material *and* ideological influences in the development of art, but object to the over-arching singularity of the cause-effect scheme that the other’s approach appears to impose. The difference between the two approaches is perhaps a matter of emphasis.

However, within this controversy there is a middle road. Not everyone who contests the proclaimed “failure” of the avant-garde necessarily contests Bürger’s basic assumption that it can be defined in terms of its aim to reintegrate art into life. As Bürger himself acknowledges, in his postscript to the second German edition of his theory, “there are those who do not accept the failure of the avant-garde movements (more precisely, the failure of their proposed reintegration of art in the

praxis of life)” (99). Another exponent of contemporary criticism, Martin Puchner, does not feel that we need to “abandon” Bürger’s ideological definition of the avant-garde, but simply to “reformulate” it in terms of genre. Puchner does not believe that conceding the aim of the avant-garde to reintegrate art into life necessarily means conceding the “failure” of this aim and of the avant-garde project. The argument is that if we examine the genre of the manifesto we can conclude that the avant-garde went some way towards achieving its aim. As Puchner writes in his essay “Screeching Voices: Avant-Garde Manifestos in the Cabaret”: “I will argue that the manifesto is the genre that is instrumental not only for formulating this project [attacks on the institution of art in an attempt to overcome the distinction between art and life], but for partially achieving it” (116). Rather than concerning himself what can be discerned from the content of avant-garde manifestos, Puchner considers that the very existence of the genre of the avant-garde manifesto is evidence enough of the avant-garde’s intention to reintegrate art into life, and of its partial success in doing so.

I would now like to introduce Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno – hypothetically and rather anachronistically – into the debate between Bürger and Scheunemann. In 1936, Walter Benjamin wrote his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Here, he considers the impact on the development of art of twentieth-century advances in reproductive techniques. Benjamin does indeed question, as does Scheunemann, “whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art” (277). However, it should be mentioned that whilst Benjamin implies that the advance of mechanical reproduction can explain the rise of the European avant-garde, he also, as Bürger puts it, “sketches a second explanation,” which accounts for the change in the “overall character of art” by an *intent* on the part of the artists concerned (29). Benjamin describes the change in the character of art in terms of a destruction of its “aura,” that is, its uniqueness, authority, and elite autonomous status, which dissolves with its reproducibility. Benjamin writes that the Dadaists, whom he considers to have been working before film was discovered (but after the invention of photography), “*intended* and achieved . . . a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production [i.e. collage]” (237-238). Benjamin

then tempers this ideological approach by claiming the Dadaist “demand” could only be fully satisfied by further material, technological developments. Margaret Cohen believes that Bürger was “inspired” by Benjamin’s second explanation when formulating his theory; that is, by the interpretation of avant-garde activity as a “transgression of traditional aesthetic categories” (Cohen 44).

Benjamin believes that technology positively aids a politicisation and socialisation of art, that is, a synthesis of art and political/social life in the form of a sublation or reintegration of art into the praxis of life. In other words, technology, whether intentionally or not, becomes the means by which art is socialised or “politicised”. Benjamin predicts that with the aid of technology, Communism will be able to harness the persuasive power of art, thereby turning it into an instrument of politics. He is convinced that the increased reproducibility of art will be useful for the “formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art” (218). With technological development, he states, “the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental” (225). If Benjamin believes the change in the function of art was a by-product of technological development, Bürger believes technology was harnessed by those with the initial intent to change the function of art. Benjamin feels that the effect of advances in technology was to reintegrate art into the social sphere. He feels technology is leading and provoking changes in ideology. Bürger, on the other hand, believes that the intent to reintegrate art into society preceded the advances in technology, and that technology simply provided the means for artists to attempt such a reintegration.

Whilst Benjamin’s predominantly materialist approach supports Scheunemann’s argument, Theodor Adorno’s approach is somewhat different. Adorno does not feel that advances in technology necessarily aid a reintegration of art into life; or, put another way, that they produce an art that is dependent on life. Adorno writes to Benjamin: “you under-estimate the technicality of autonomous art and over-estimate that of dependent art” (*Aesthetics* 120-126). For Adorno, advances in technology could just as much aid the old institutional autonomy of art as they could aid the reintegration of art into life, the “disenchantment” of art. Adorno believed that the distance between autonomous and dependent art was closer

than Benjamin thought. In fact, as he wrote to Benjamin, he thought the differing ontologies of art were simply “torn halves of an integral freedom” (34). It could be said that Adorno foresaw the potential for the “false sublation of autonomous art” that is to be discussed shortly.

Thus, for Adorno, advances in technology are not necessarily a means of reintegrating art into life, and should not be interpreted as such. Benjamin’s belief that technologically influenced art would automatically result in a reintegration of art into politics and social life was challenged by Adorno’s caution. Adorno concedes that advances in technology can be used to explain the change in the “mode of reception” of art but does not hold out hope that this changed mode will result in a revolutionary politicisation of art.

(ii) Subject under Investigation

Having introduced the context of my research, I will now introduce the subject under investigation. The focus of my research is to be the identification of the intentions of the historical avant-garde movements, be those intentions unified or totally incohesive, whether they are carried out in artistic practice or not. There is much speculation surrounding the actual intention of the historical avant-garde. Whereas Bürger claims the avant-garde, as a whole, aspired to reintegrate art into life and to return to a pre-modernist unity, and Puchner concedes this claim, others believe this to be a generalisation, and do not think the avant-garde ever had the “common intention” to reintegrate itself into the praxis of life and relinquish its autonomous mode (Scheunemann 16). If the latter is the case, the intentions of the avant-garde still remain to be established, even if they differ from movement to movement, from manifesto to manifesto. In an attempt to resolve such controversy with regard to avant-gardist intention, I would like to reassess the European avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century from a new perspective. I would like to attempt to clarify this issue by returning to consult the primary evidence of the avant-garde manifestos in order to search for formulations of intention with regard to the status and place of art in society. This is an area that could well benefit from further research, since much contemporary study rests upon this ambiguous foundation. This investigation will also attempt, as far as the scope allows, to take into

consideration the political and social connotations of differing aesthetic approaches, which may have shaped and influenced avant-gardist intention.

Since the material I will be using for my research will be primarily the avant-garde manifestos themselves, the first-hand accounts of avant-gardist intention, it will be useful to introduce the genre of the manifesto and my reasons for choosing it. The manifesto can be defined as “a public declaration of principles, policies, or *intentions*, especially of a *political* nature” (“Manifesto,” A.H. my emphases). Other than the obvious use of manifestos in determining avant-gardist intention, it will be useful to look more closely at the theory of critic Martin Puchner, who steers a middle course between the polarised theories of Bürger and Scheunemann. Puchner, no doubt, would be classed by Bürger as one of those who do not accept the failure of the attempt of the avant-garde movements to reintegrate art into life. Puchner believes that if Bürger’s theory is reshaped by means of an additional focus on the generic constitution of the avant-garde manifesto, then Bürger’s thesis concerning the unique attempt of the avant-garde to overcome the distinction between art and life via an attack on the institution of art is strengthened. Puchner argues that the sudden emergence of the genre of the manifesto was instrumental in formulating this avant-garde project, and that the manifesto “not only articulates but also enacts what Bürger considers its grand project, namely the overcoming of the difference between art and life” (“Screeching” 117).

Puchner considers that the use of the manifesto demonstrates the avant-garde’s desire to involve itself directly in the political sphere (here synonymous with the public sphere):

The manifesto actually manages what remains impossible for the other arts, namely to evade, if not to erase altogether, the divide between the institution of art and the public sphere. . . . This evasion allows us to consider not so much the failure of the avant-garde, but the effects and specific strategies it implemented in pursuit of its impossible goal [i.e. the transformation of not only art but also life itself] (“Screeching” 117).

The manifesto succeeds in being at once artistic and political, in somehow *balancing* the two. The logic behind Puchner’s argument is that the manifesto, or “declaration,” was originally a political medium through which to voice collective revolutionary dissent. Having been appropriated by activist groups in the

seventeenth century from the royal power base of the state, revolutionary manifestos gained force during the revolutions of France, America, and Russia. As Puchner explains, these manifestos imitated the authoritative tone of voice of the status quo and became increasingly aggressive during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the rise of the political and artistic avant-garde which followed the example of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.³ Since then the manifesto has become the "standard form for art and politics alike in which to voice dissent [and] demand a rupture with the status quo" (Puchner, "Screeching" 115). Thus, it can clearly be seen how the generic constitution of the manifesto blurs distinctions between the political and the non-political. Since political engagement is inherent in the actual function, structure and history of the manifesto, the genre is located across the divide between art and the praxis of life and can thus achieve a degree of engagement "unattainable by the genre of engaged art". Thus, what is being proposed by Puchner is a "reformulation" of Bürger's project in terms of genre.⁴

Puchner only briefly mentions that the manifestos actually "formulate" and "articulate" the avant-garde's ambitious project, and this is something which I would like to investigate further. Puchner himself highlights the fact that he puts weight "on the genre of the manifesto rather than on its content," accounting for this by the unconventional, abstract, often playful nature of the manifesto's content ("Screeching" 118). What I am interested in is whether, as the choice of genre seems to suggest, the actual content of the artistic avant-garde manifestos shows evidence of extra-aesthetic designs. Are these declarations of intention alluding or even directly referring to a reintegration with the praxis of life? Does the content of the manifestos confirm that the historical avant-garde is, as its use of this genre suggests, "eager to regain its connection to politics"? (Puchner, "Screeching" 116). This

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* defined for many subsequent writers what a manifesto should be, see Puchner's extensive study on this genre: *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴ It should be mentioned that six years later, in his book *Poetry of the Revolution* (2006), it would seem that Puchner changes his view and takes to task the theory of the avant-garde put forth by Bürger, claiming that "the mere fact that political and art manifestos were related to one another does not mean that they wanted to or managed to create a total fusion of the two domains" (79). However, for the purposes of this study Puchner's initial standpoint as a proponent of Bürger's theory will be taken at face value and used to represent the view that the existence of the art manifesto is evidence of the avant-garde's aim to fuse art with the praxis of life.

study will seek to decipher the “abstract” content of the manifesto as the best means of determining whether the claim that the avant-garde intended a reintegration of art into political and social life can be substantiated, or whether, as Scheunemann argues, the avant-garde had, in fact, no “common intention” whatsoever, let alone such an impractical and idealistic one.

Aside from the actual existence of the genre of avant-garde manifestos, I would like to look for more reliable evidence of the intention to reintegrate art into life in the voices of the individual manifestos themselves. In other words, does the content of the manifestos confirm what the genre of the avant-garde manifesto would seem to promise? The question becomes one of whether or not the avant-garde actually articulates its alleged aim to destroy the autonomous institution of art.

(iii) The Category of the Autonomy of Art

Before going any further, it is necessary to consider the concept and category of the autonomy of art, along with its history and evolution. Bürger writes that “all discussion of this category must be judged by the extent to which it succeeds in showing and explaining logically and historically the contradictoriness inherent in the thing itself” (36). Thus, care will be taken to elucidate the contradictory aspects of the autonomy of art in bourgeois society. The autonomy of art is described by Bürger as a category of that society.

In attempting to explain the complexity of the concept of the autonomy of art that he himself upholds, Bürger tries to show the contradictory nature of the process by which art became autonomous. Whilst, he admits, it is impossible to sketch a history of art as an institution in bourgeois society because “the requisite preliminary studies in the arts and social sciences have not been done,” he goes on to discuss diverging approaches towards a “materialist explanation of the genesis of the category of ‘autonomy’ . . . [in attempt to arrive at] a clarification of both the concept and the thing” (36). However, so widely diverging are the approaches to an explanation of the genesis of the process by which art became autonomous, that Bürger fails to find proof of or reasons for the commonly conceived correlation between the genesis of the autonomy of art and the rise of bourgeois society.

The detachment of art from the praxis of life is generally viewed as a

historical development which evolved along with the evolution of capitalist society. Adorno, who is quoted by Bürger in order to illustrate his own understanding of the category of autonomy, states that art's autonomy, its growing independence from society, "was a function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom" that saw artworks "no longer distorted by exchange, profit and the false needs of a degraded humanity" (A.T. 225, 227). It is generally considered that the rise of a capitalist bourgeois society in the eighteenth century brought with it the "modern concept of art as a comprehensive designation for poetry, music, the stage, sculpture, painting and architecture"; these were disciplines that differed from all other "divisions of labour" (Hans Kuhn, qtd. in Bürger 42). The arts were essentially "removed from the context of everyday life and conceived of as something that could be treated as a whole. . . . As a realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure, this whole was contrasted with the life of society" (Bürger 42).

Such a concept of art came into being with the constitution of aesthetics as an "autonomous sphere of philosophical knowledge" (Bürger 42). Bürger describes how, in this process, a fundamental tenet of artistic self-understanding was undermined, that of the unity within art of *delectare* and *prodesse*, of pleasure and benefit. A non-purposive realm of art was constructed, *prodesse* or "function" – beyond the mimetic function of realism – becoming an extra-aesthetic factor. This was the only category of bourgeois society which managed to escape means-ends rationality, and as a result, "artistic production is divorced from the totality of social activities and comes to confront them abstractly" (42). Any works with an element of "prodesse," didacticism, or moralising were censured as inartistic. The staking out of the aesthetic sphere as distinct from all practical life contexts can be attributed in large part to Kant, whose *Critique of Judgement* of 1790 determines the aesthetic judgement as "disinterested," as bearing no relation to the "faculty of desire" (§ 2). The aesthetic, thus conceived, was not a sphere that could fall victim to the constraints of the developing bourgeois-capitalist society. The capitalist principle of the maximisation of profit now prevailed in all other spheres of life and by creating an independent aesthetic sphere art could remain free from corruption and exploitation. Art could provide disinterested pleasure, but could not perform a social or moral function.

If Bürger feels the work of Adorno can illustrate his own understanding of the contradictory character of the category of autonomy, it may be helpful to first examine more closely what Adorno has to say on the relation of art and society and what he terms the “Doppelcharakter,” or double character, of art in his *Aesthetic Theory*. Bürger demonstrates how Adorno’s conflicting approach leads him to write one moment that the autonomy of art “remains irrevocable” and another that it is impossible to conceive of such autonomy without “covering up” the social conditioning of works (A.T. 9; Versuch 88). In other words, as Adorno acknowledges, “art is autonomous and it is not” (A.T. 6). A look at the context of this quote reveals that Adorno realises it is difficult for us to comprehend how this is so; he offers the explanation that “without what is heterogeneous to it, [art’s] autonomy eludes it,” since art “exists only in relation to its other” (6). In a sense, art has a parasitical dependency on society, thus it can negate society all it will, yet will still remain wholly dependent on it. In fact, Adorno states that “admixed with art’s own concept is the ferment of its own abolition” because, “right down to the smallest detail of [its] autonomy, . . . [it] is not only art but something foreign and opposed to it” (6). Bürger describes Burkhardt Lindner’s thesis as something similar: the hypothesis that “the demand by art for sublation is already germinally present in its autonomy,” since art can never be autonomous in an autarkical sense without being self-destructive (99).

Adorno goes on to maintain that although “the demarcation line between art and the empirical must not be effaced,” that is, art must not become autonomous in an autarkical sense, “artworks nevertheless have a life sui generis” (4). The sphere of art is autonomous in a self-governing sense, not to be mistaken for self-sufficiency. Art is its own master and “negates the categorical determinations stamped on the empirical world” (5). Art aids “the non-identical, which in reality is repressed by reality’s compulsion to [identify and categorise]” (4). In Adorno’s eyes, aesthetic identity seeks to aid the abolition of “identifying thought,” of thinking solely in terms of pre-determined categories (Negative 146-148).

So art has a life of its own and is governed by its own laws, negating those of society, yet it is not wholly distinct, and “harbours what is empirically existing in its own substance”; as artifacts and products of social labour artworks draw their

content from the empirical (5). Artworks in fact “seal themselves off from what they themselves are” (227). Adorno notes:

[Whilst] it is easy to [argue] that art’s autonomous realm has nothing in common with the external world other than borrowed elements that have entered into a fully changed context, . . . there is no contesting the cliché of which cultural history is so fond, that the development of artistic processes, usually classed under the heading of style, corresponds to social development (5).

Furthermore, such “borrowed elements” have not simply been inserted into art, rather, art is motivated by experiences that are related to “those of the objective world from which they recoil,” that is, “the unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form” (6). Artworks must constantly renew “the act of repulsion” in relation to the empirical, for “at every moment they threaten once again to tumble [in]” (6). Indeed, Hegel’s argument against Kant is that “the moment a limit is posited, it is overstepped and that against which the limit was established is absorbed” (Adorno A.T. 6). This serves as Adorno’s critique of the *l’art pour l’art* concept of the autonomy of art, a concept which perceives art strictly aesthetically and thus engages in a “misperception”. Adorno writes: “only when art’s other is sensed as a primary layer in the experience of art does it become possible to sublimate this layer . . . [and come to grips with the true nature of the concept of autonomy] without the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference” (6).

Adorno concedes the contradictoriness of the category of the autonomy of art in bourgeois society and adds that “art’s double character as both autonomous and *fait social* is incessantly reproduced on the level of its autonomy” (5). In speaking of artworks, he also goes on to write, “their double character is manifest at every point; they change and contradict themselves” (227). Finally, Adorno feels that only as long as art remains unconscious of the “fetishism” and elitism that is bestowed upon it by the program of *l’art pour l’art*, and does not consciously advocate “delusion” or autarky by insisting that “otherwise art would not exist,” can it be spared being forced “into an aporia” (228). For art must acknowledge its other if it is not to sever its own preconditions. The autonomy of art must never become a matter of indifference, for art is parasitical and society is its host.

In recounting his own understanding of autonomy, Bürger acknowledges that

this category is necessary to any definition of art in bourgeois society, yet he feels it can all too easily be misunderstood when it fails to reveal that it is “socially conditioned,” i.e. that it is a product of a historical and social development, and thus obscures the “double character” of art. For Bürger the hidden aspect of autonomy is the “social determinacy of the process” (36). This is where Bürger feels that the category of “autonomy” he is working with – that of Adorno – differs from other competing concepts. Bürger does not want his concept of autonomy to be equated with the alternative autonomy concept of *l’art pour l’art*, since this concept attributes art’s apartness from society to its inherent “nature” and not to a historical and social development. The autonomy concept of *l’art pour l’art* denies the social aspect of autonomy, and thus the “double character” of art as both *fait social* and independent. Neither does Bürger want his concept of autonomy equated to that which sees autonomy as something merely in the minds of the artists themselves, as something invisible to the man on the street. Such a view also refutes the insight that autonomy is historically conditioned; autonomy, in this instance, is mere illusion. The feeling is that both these polarised concepts of autonomy are too simplistic and fail to convey the paradoxical nature of the category.

Bürger goes on to sketch Schiller’s addition to the Kantian classification of the aesthetic judgement as distinct from purposive judgements. In his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller, Bürger explains, provides a definition of the “social function of the aesthetic” (44). At first Schiller’s approach seems paradoxical since Kant had emphasised the non-purposiveness and disinterestedness of the aesthetic judgement, which one would think implied the functionlessness of art. However, as Bürger explains, Schiller demonstrates that it is precisely the functionlessness of art that gives it its function. As Adorno writes many years later, “insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness” (A.T. 227). “Art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art” (A.T. 225).

Schiller believes it is only through an autonomy of art that the “halves” of man, which have been torn apart by the capitalist division of labour, can be put back together in order to reconstruct the withered wholeness of human nature. However, Bürger points out the fact that the socially conditioned aspect of the autonomy of art

is invisible, and in effect vanishes once the category of “autonomy” is created. Thus, the mistaken idea develops that the work of art is “totally independent from society” in an autarkical sense, that independence is part of the very “nature” of art as with the *l’art pour l’art* concept of autonomy. Bürger feels that the autonomy of art all too easily comes to stand for the autarky of art i.e. the total self-sufficiency of art in relation to society. The concept of the autarky of art can be traced from misreadings of Kant and Schiller through to Théophile Gautier’s manifesto of *l’art pour l’art* and the late nineteenth-century popularisation of the Aestheticist movement in France.

(iv) Negation of the Autonomy of Art

Having explained his concept of the autonomy of art and contextualised it with reference to Adorno, Kant, and Schiller, Bürger goes on to write of the negation of the autonomy of art by the twentieth-century avant-garde. Bürger states that in reaction to bourgeois institutionalisation and the aestheticism of the nineteenth century “the avant-garde intends the abolition [“Aufhebung”] of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be reintegrated into the praxis of life” (54). The theory revolves around the notion that the avant-garde wanted to return to a pre-reflective, pre-aesthetic unity of art and life, though the course of action by which these two domains were to be synthesised was undetermined. In this thesis I refer to such a concept of art as *l’art pour la vie* (“art for the sake of life”) – as distinct from *l’art pour l’art* – since this best reflects the focus on Bürger’s formulation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, comparable concepts were known as *l’art social* and *l’art pour tous*, and referred to the drive to democratise art.

According to Bürger, a reengagement of art with reality was demanded by avant-garde movements such as the Surrealists and Dadaists who felt that although the intention of the bourgeois artists had been to ward off alienation and art’s loss of utopian perspective, ironically, their actions had exacerbated feelings of isolation and loneliness by eradicating a visible social function of the aesthetic. Art could not combat man’s isolation whilst exiled from social reality. Bourgeois society could not live up to the utopian ideals of elitist bourgeois aesthetics. As has been mentioned, when Kant set German bourgeois idealist aesthetics in motion, he did not intend to strip art of any social, or “real life,” consequence (Bürger 42-44). It is possible to

take the view that the extent of the divide between art and life might have been a purely theoretical perception of the avant-garde that was invisible to the man on the street, but, as Bürger's theory would have it, it nevertheless led to numerous practical attempts to dissolve it.

In developing his theory of the avant-garde, Bürger distinguishes between modernism and the avant-garde, defining the avant-garde as a movement that attempted to "lead art back into social praxis" (Schulte-Sasse xiv). For Bürger, the avant-garde of the 1920s was the first movement in art history that "turned against the institution 'art' and the mode in which autonomy functions" (Schulte-Sasse xiv). From as early as the mid-nineteenth century, modernism may have been understandable as an attack on traditional artistic practice, but its mode of existence was still determined by an acceptance of autonomy. Modernist criticism remained "system-immanent". Any reengagement with society was still theoretical and did not reach a practical level.

It should be stressed that the fact that Bürger qualifies his concept of autonomy, steering it away from the *l'art pour l'art* concept of the Aestheticists, is highly significant to a correct reading of his theory. For, in claiming that the avant-garde aimed to negate the autonomy of art, he does not imply that they wished to negate the "nature" of art, which would be an attack on the very fabric and existence of art, but that they merely tried to reverse the social process that established art as an autonomous category of bourgeois society; to defy those who thought as Adorno does that "art's autonomy remains irrevocable" (1). Hence, Bürger makes no claims that the avant-garde was "anti-art," merely "anti-aestheticist". Thus, Bürger's proclamation that the avant-garde failed to abolish the autonomous institution of art does not necessarily mean that it failed on all counts to establish a significantly improved relationship between art and life from within the institution, a theory quite compatible with that of Puchner who believes the avant-garde "partially achieved" its aim. Bürger himself goes as far as to question the extent to which "after the October revolution, because social conditions had changed, the Russian avant-gardists succeeded, to a degree, in realising their intent to reintegrate art into the praxis of life" (114, fn. 21). A failure to achieve *l'art pour la vie* does not necessitate an immediate submission to extreme aestheticism. For a failure to be absolute, the

attempt must also be absolute. Bürger's notion of the autonomy of art is a lot more fluid than that of Gautier and the Aestheticists.

Nevertheless, Bürger ultimately concludes his theory of the avant-garde by claiming that despite the intentions of the avant-garde, the project failed to reintegrate art into the praxis of life via an abolition of the institution of art. Bürger writes: "This [reintegration] has not occurred and presumably cannot occur in bourgeois society unless it be as a false sublation of autonomous art" (54). As Adorno explains, art must go into hibernation and wait for better times, since a genuine reintegration of art into life is impossible until our society develops a status more conducive to such a sublation: "All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function . . . are doomed" (A.T. 1). Bürger goes even further in asking whether, in light of "the experience of the false sublation of autonomy, . . . a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all, whether the distance between art and the praxis of life is not requisite for that free space within which alternatives to what exist become conceivable" (54). Autonomous art allows us to think of other than what already exists and breaks out of the established categorisation of thought, away from "identity thinking" (Adorno, Negative 146-148). When Adorno and Bürger talk of a false sublation of autonomy, they are referring to pulp fiction and commodity aesthetics – the "culture industry" – in which art is not an instrument of emancipation as the avant-gardists intended it, but rather one of subjection, one which "enthralls," deludes, and manipulates. A false sublation of art into society can be defined, in Benjaminian terms, as a fascist "aestheticisation" of life, as opposed to its polar opposite: a true avant-gardist socialisation or "politicisation" of art ("Work" 242). An aestheticisation of life sees society sublated into art and drowned in the illusory, as opposed to that which Bürger claims is initially intended by the avant-garde: a sublation of art into life. This is *la vie pour l'art* rather than *l'art pour la vie*. Similar to Benjamin's distinction is the earlier Brechtian notion that National Socialism was a "false article," a pseudo-socialism whose autonomous aesthetic sphere created an illusory reconciliatory synthesis with life, as opposed to socialism or communism, which was the "genuine article," aiming for an authentic

reconciliation of art with life.⁵

(v) Summary of Aims

Ultimately, what I would like to subject to examination is whether the content of the manifestos of the avant-garde supports Bürger's claim that the avant-garde of the early twentieth century was indeed aiming for, in Brechtian terms, a "genuine" reconciliation of art and life: a politicisation of art. Do the manifestos confirm that the avant-garde intended to redress the social impotency of art by subsuming it into the praxis of life, thus ensuring a more effective social engagement? Furthermore, was the onset of the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements primarily the result of any such altered aesthetic ideology, or was it rather, to come back to Scheunemann's suggestion, the result of more materialistic changes? Perhaps it will in fact prove necessary to advocate the formulation of a new theory of the avant-garde in terms of both ideological and material changes. Indeed, commentator Russell Berman cannot understand why Bürger attempts to define the emergence of the avant-garde "solely in terms of the development of the institution of art, with no reference to broader social transformations" (46).

I intend to put the manifestos of the chief movements of the historical avant-garde under close scrutiny, in an attempt to determine whether any ideological motives are articulated and can be identified. Thus, the main substance of the following study is to be analytical, covering ground that seems not to have been fully explored as yet. Until now, the study of avant-garde art, indeed of twentieth-century art, has "by and large failed to understand the ramifications of the manifesto, which becomes a central and consequential form of expression" (Puchner, "Screeching" 116). There are several invaluable anthologies of avant-garde manifestos such as *Manifeste und Proklamationen der europäischen Avantgarde (1909 – 1938)* [Manifestos and Proclamations of the European Avant-Garde] edited by Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders; *Manifesto: a century of isms*, edited by Mary Ann

⁵ Bertolt Brecht wrote in his *Arbeitsjournal* on Dec. 24, 1947: "National Socialism must be viewed as the socialism of the petite bourgeoisie, a crippled, neurasthenic, perverted people's movement which provided or promised to provide a welcome substitute for that which was demanded from below; welcome, that is, to the ruling class. These pseudo-socialist rudiments must therefore be compared to the genuine article, not to 'democracy'" (801; trans. in Stollman, 53).

Caws; *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: an anthology of changing ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. However, close readings of the manifestos themselves have been limited to a select few: “The Surrealist Manifestoes,” *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism*, Anna Balakian; “‘Violence and Precision’: The Manifesto as Art form,” *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre and the Language of Rupture*, Marjorie Perloff; or have neglected to consider the intention of the avant-garde highlighted by Bürger, “namely the intention to smash the ‘institution of art’ and ‘translate’ art back into life” (Kramer 118): *Manifeste: Intentionalität* [Manifestos: “Intentionality”] ed. Hubert van den Berg and Ralf Grüttmeier. There are a handful of works which focus on the function of the avant-garde manifesto: *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915*, Luca Somigli; *Manifestoes: Proclamations of the Modern*, Janet Lyon; and *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Martin Puchner. However, comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the historical avant-garde manifestos, with a view to determining avant-gardist intention and formulating a new theory of the avant-garde, is wanting.⁶

It will also be important to remain aware, throughout this study, that there could well be discrepancy between the manifestos of the avant-garde and their actual works, between avant-gardist theory and practice. In other words, it cannot be taken for granted that the avant-garde movements lived up to and followed their programs. In commenting on *Du Cubisme*, the first substantial first-hand account of Cubism, David Cottington writes of the confusion that arose from “attempts to read the manifesto in direct and unmediated relation to the canonical works of cubism” (144). Such attempts rested on the misconception that “the writing which Gleizes and Metzinger undertook to accompany their visual practice can be read unproblematically as an explanation of it” (144). Cottington feels that it is important to understand the delicacy of the relationship between critical and artistic practices. That is, to realise that *Du Cubisme* was first and foremost a contribution to the debate

⁶ It is a requirement of the European Avant-Garde project that work be produced in the English language and be accessible without the need for a full understanding of the many European languages in which the Avant-Garde groups worked. All quotes and excerpts from manifestos will thus appear in English translation in this thesis, with a clear indication of how to access the original version of the material. In addition, consideration of word count would not allow for an inclusion of each original text alongside its translation.

on the meaning of “a cubism that was a critical and ultimately ideological construct, and only secondarily an explanation of cubist paintings” (145). This discrepancy between ideology and practice is an issue that must be borne in mind, though further investigation exceeds the scope of this study. The focus here is on intention and not eventual result or effect, on avant-gardist theory rather than on practice.

However, Marjorie Perloff, in her analysis of Futurist manifestos, has suggested that, since Futurism, avant-garde manifestos themselves are valid as artistic practice, and can be considered as art forms which transcend the merely political and enter into the realm of poetry and art by borrowing from the avant-garde genre of visual poetry.⁷ This would mean that the avant-garde, in producing manifestos, automatically realised its proclaimed ambition to create an art which engaged with life. However, for the manifesto to enter the realm of art could be seen as an aestheticisation of something political rather than an “authentic” sublation of art into the political arena. Blurring the boundaries between manifesto and art work in the latter manner, and thereby transcending Perloff’s formulation, Puchner puts forth the alternative theory that “all art works of the avant-garde aspire to the condition of the manifesto,” which, he acknowledges, “may seem counter-productive to those who have attempted, against all odds, to practice close readings of avant-garde art, imposing onto it modes of reception that are taken from the modernist canon and its cult of difficulty” (“Screeching” 127). At an International conference on the Avant-Garde in 2002, Puchner, in his paper on “Art and Manifesto in the Neo-Avant-Garde,” proposed a new category “to capture the uneasy alliance and struggle at work in such mixtures of art and manifesto,” which he terms “manifesto art”. This revolutionary form of art is evidence, Puchner feels, of the avant-garde’s successful attempt to push art onto the political stage and to assimilate itself into society. By modelling its work on a contemporary form of public communication used by those in the political sphere, the avant-garde became *fait social* by association. Fundamental to a full understanding of Puchner’s theory that the avant-garde partially achieved a reintegration of art into life is, no doubt, not only his agreement

⁷ Marjorie Perloff’s essay, “‘Violence and Precision’: The Manifesto as Art form,” first appeared in *Chicago Review*, 34:2, Spring 1984, under the title “Some Things Worth Considering Before Beginning to think about Poetry and Politics,” and was reprinted in her book, *The Futurist Moment, Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre and the Language of Rupture* (80-115).

with Perloff that certain avant-garde manifestos are “closely intertwined” with art forms thereby partially “enacting” as well as “articulating” the avant-gardist project (“Screeching” 117; 119), but also his classification of certain forms of avant-garde art as manifestos.

Indeed, Bürger recognises such a quality in the works of Dadaist Marcel Duchamp – such as his *Urinoir* – which, he claims, were not in fact “works of art, but manifestations [of a theory or ideology]” (52). This would seem to imply that Duchamp’s art takes the manifesto as its point of departure, a manifesto being a declaration of ideology. Duchamp himself made it clear that some of his works were a “form of manifestation” which were “never dictated by esthetic delectation” (“Apropos” 141). So, it is possible that avant-garde art works were, at times, actually intended to be considered as manifestos. Although it could be interesting, in selecting the manifestos which are to undergo systematic examination, to include visual works of art, this would stretch the amount of material beyond the capacity of this study. Such works would also always be mediated by interpretation and thus I could not be sure of their usefulness in determining the intention of the avant-garde. At this point, I will restrict the material of this study to verbal language manifestos.

When selecting the manifestos I will examine, it will be interesting to note the theory of Abastado who seeks to establish what in “writing and in general social practice, one names ‘manifestos’” (3). Abastado identifies several different types of work (predominantly but not exclusively relating to verbal speeches; Abastado is another who identifies certain visual works of art as having a “manifesto effect”) which all serve the function of a manifesto whether entitled as such or not. Consequently, this investigation will also consider texts which do not carry the label of “manifesto,” so long as they can be classed under a synonymous heading such as “declaration,” “proclamation,” or “pronouncement,” and serve as a statement of a particular movement’s ideology: its “principles, policies or intentions” (“Manifesto” American).

This study will aim to dissect the manifestos of the historical movements of Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, the Russian Avant-Garde, Dadaism and Surrealism; amongst these lie the movements that Bürger is accused of sidestepping (Scheunemann, ed. 7-8). Whilst Bürger claims his theory applies primarily to the

avant-garde of the 1920s (Dada, Surrealism and the post-revolution Russian avant-garde), he believes that, "with certain limitations that would have to be determined through concrete analyses," his theory also applies to Italian Futurism and German Expressionism (109, fn. 4). I would like to make it the task of this study to determine these limitations, along with any that appear within Bürger's primary case studies, by means of "concrete analysis" of the movements' manifestos. The Cubist manifestos will be examined because, although Bürger exempts Cubism from inclusion in his theory of the avant-garde, he acknowledges it as part of the historical avant-garde movements, since it "calls into question the system of representation . . . that had prevailed since the Renaissance" (109, fn. 4). The scope of this study will not allow for a full literary analysis with regard to the style of the manifestos; the study will, in the main, restrict itself to an examination of the content of the manifestos with the aim of discovering artists' true intentions towards the social status of their work and their own role in society.

Although Bürger is also criticised for exclusively focussing on the arts of painting and literature, and failing to address art forms such as music, film, and the performing arts, this study will also restrict itself to manifestos relating to these two art forms. Whilst an alternative theory of the avant-garde would clearly benefit from the exploration of material relating to a wider range of art forms, this is beyond the capacity of a single study that aims to cover such a wide range of movements.

The manifestos of the movements named are spread across the first three decades of the twentieth century. In the 1930s, the vast majority of the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements were halted in their optimistic tracks by the political forces of Fascism in Europe and Stalinist cultural politics in Russia, regaining acceptance only in the 1960s once the Second World War and its aftermath had reached a conclusion. Whether the historical avant-garde would have come to a natural end in the absence of these forces is open to discussion. Unfortunately, the span of this study will not permit an examination of the manifestos of the neo-avant-garde, written in the second half of the twentieth century. It would be interesting in a subsequent study to consider what the manifestos of Concrete Poetry, Oulipo, Situationism, Fluxus, Neoism, and Dogma reveal about the intentions of the neo-avant-garde.

As an ancillary investigation, throughout this study I will try, wherever possible, to note the political and social impact of my findings. I will finally investigate the social criticism of Adorno and Jürgen Habermas to see whether, in the light of my socially related findings, I agree with what they prescribe the neo-avant-garde should aim for today. Whether the avant-garde, since the 1970s, has in fact taken on the advice of this “postmodern” prescription is reserved for a further study, yet the nature of such advice could help to determine the extra-aesthetic ramifications of the historical avant-garde.

Ultimately, however, the focus of this study is to determine, through an examination of its manifestos, whether or not, as it is generally held, the historical avant-garde intended to penetrate life by tearing down the institutions of art. If not, the question will become one of what the avant-garde actually did intend: was it a retention of its original autonomous status in the form of *l'art pour l'art*, or something different altogether?

Chapter 1 – EXPRESSIONISM

The following chapter will be devoted to the examination of a selection of manifestos – or documents that can be classed as belonging to the genre of the manifesto – stemming from the avant-garde movement of German Expressionism and spanning the period from 1906 to 1919. The aim is to scrutinize them for any explicit aesthetic intentions, with an eye to the political and social implications of such intentions, and to compare these findings with the theories of the avant-garde put forward by Peter Bürger, Dietrich Scheunemann and Martin Puchner.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, new artistic movements emerged in France in the form of Impressionism and Symbolism. Both movements were reacting to differing degrees against the realism and naturalism of the second half of the nineteenth century, and are associated primarily with the visual arts and literature respectively. With Marx's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 as their model (see Introduction 8), the Impressionists and Symbolists first began to see the potential of the genre of the manifesto for conveying radical new ideas. As Martin Puchner highlights, for the first time, in the late nineteenth century, the use of the genre of the manifesto crossed over from the sphere of politics into that of art (*Poetry* 69-76). Even though at the time many texts did not yet carry the title "manifesto," these programmatic texts had "clearly learned from the foundational force of the [revolutionary] political manifestos, which were coming into their own at the same time" and thus belonged to the genre of the manifesto (72). The text that is often considered one of the first genuine art manifestos is Jean Moréas's article "Le Symbolisme" of 1886, which was reprinted as "Symbolism. Manifesto of Jean Moréas" in 1889. This was followed in 1899 by Paul Signac's "From Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism," considered as a manifesto in defence of Neo-Impressionist ideas. Whilst the new movements had not yet harnessed the full power of their new medium, art "manifestos" could potentially take advantage of the connotations of their genre to address wider issues than merely the aesthetics of the movement from which they emanated. As early as the 1880s the Neo-Impressionists began to stress the political relevance of their work, believing that their formally innovative works could have a socially transformative effect. In an article of 1891

entitled "Impressionists and Revolutionaries," Neo-Impressionist and anarcho-Communist Paul Signac wrote:

[The revolutionary] tendency will be found . . . in pure aesthetes – revolutionaries by temperament, who, departing from the beaten track, paint what they see, as they feel it, and, often unconsciously, give a solid pick blow to the old social edifice. . . . Sooner or later the veritable artists will be found at the side of the insurgents, united with them in one and the same notion of justice ("Impressionists" 797).

It would seem that to adopt the genre of the manifesto was the obvious choice for the progressive art movements of the time since no other genre could better impart their revolutionary ambitions, and their desire to break with the old "ism" and embrace the new. Puchner compares the "art manifesto" with the forms of literary polemic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, showing that before the political manifesto entered the sphere of art, artistic writings existed in the form of "romantic prefaces, defences and fragments" that presented themselves as "literary criticism rather than as a political and revolutionary intervention" (*Poetry* 70; 69). Puchner refers to William Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, the fragments of Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "A Defense of Poetry" (69-70). The main difference between the art manifesto of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the polemic of the romantic era amounts to the difference between a condensed, formulated attack on rival "isms" and a discursive defence of a new "ism." The manifesto was also considered as a communal act of self-foundation, designed to represent the views of a new group of people. Both Impressionism with its introduction of the subjective element and Symbolism with its introduction of the expression of ideas can be seen as precursors of Expressionism. German Expressionism, alongside the less prominent French Expressionist movement known as Fauvism, is most often taken as the first movement of the historical avant-garde, and is the earliest movement to be mentioned by Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. The philosopher Georg Lukács refers to the theoretical texts of Expressionism as being marked by a "manifesto-type quality" ("Expressionism" 102), and, as Ritchie Robertson observes, these texts were "an intrinsic part of the Expressionist output" (98).

(i) Die Brücke: Kirchner

The first “manifesto” of the Expressionist movement was written in 1906 by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, chief spokesman of the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke* [The Bridge], and published as a woodcut broadsheet to accompany the exhibition of the group at the Seifert factory in Dresden. Kirchner was one of the founders of the group which was formed by a group of painters in Dresden in 1905. The brevity of Kirchner’s declaration, “Gedrucktes Programm der Künstlergruppe ‘Brücke’” (“Printed Program of the Artists’ Group ‘Brücke’”), permits the whole text to be cited:

With faith in development and in a new generation of creators and appreciators we call together all youth. As youth, we carry the future and want to create for ourselves freedom of life and of movement against the long-established older forces. Everyone who with directness and authenticity conveys that which drives him to creation, belongs to us (328).

Indeed, not much can be gleaned from such a brief statement, and yet something of the atmosphere of the times can perhaps be sensed. Gaining such an impression may aid a deeper understanding of the feeling of the times to be traversed, and should make it easier to conceive the succeeding “manifestos” in the context in which they were written. To provide some background, although this should not be interpreted as a smooth linear progression, Expressionism was part of a reaction against the “long established older forces” of realism and naturalism in art and literature, inspired by, as well as transcending, both Impressionism and Symbolism. Naturalism, which has its roots in the early Renaissance period, and was, as a style, adopted by many artists throughout the centuries, was advocated by the Realist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. This movement favoured the close, objective representation of realistic objects in a natural setting. The Realist movement and nineteenth-century naturalism were, in their turn, a reaction against romanticism which, originating in the mid-eighteenth century, stressed the sublimity of nature and encouraged strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience.

In its time, romanticism had been a revolt against the rationalisation of nature of the European Enlightenment period. Indeed, Wilhelm Worringer in his *Abstraction and Empathy* of 1908 identified a will to abstraction, as against realism, in art as a recurrent historical phenomenon. French Impressionism was, perhaps, the

initial revolt against nineteenth-century naturalism, questioning the adherence to rational, practical goals, and paving the way for Expressionism. Impressionism, however, never quite relinquished the representation of nature and depiction of the external world, though it brought the senses of the individual to bear on it. Symbolism reacted against Impressionism's adherence to naturalistic aims and advocated the visual expression of ideas by means of symbolic imagery and, as Signac put it, sought to "clothe the Idea with a sensible form" ("Symbolism" 1015). In addition to the impetus of Impressionism and Symbolism, Expressionism arose from the various German "Secessions" of the 1890s that rejected the art of the establishment along with its function of exalting the reigning dynasty and depicting approved historical subjects. The Secessions encouraged knowledge of Impressionist art, holding exhibitions and promoting international exchanges. Some members of the Munich Secession were particularly interested in "giving expression to a characteristically German Romantic attitude towards nature" (Dube 12).

Whilst it appears that Expressionism had much in common with romanticism, and can be said to hark back to the idealism of pre-Realist times, it differed in that the form of art would "no longer be obliged to appear in the guise of nymphs, heroes and allegories" (Dube 7). Expressionism was to use the foothold that the Secessions provided to establish itself as a new "ism" in its rejection of the lingering naturalistic aims of Impressionism, and of the subordination of the form to the idea with the resulting restriction of expression that was characteristic of Symbolism. However, as will be seen, Expressionism was prepared to pick and choose, taking advantage of Impressionism's introduction of the subjective and Symbolism's introduction of emotional expression into art. Yet, it is presumably the mark of its own, to be determined in this chapter, that Expressionism made on the developments of Impressionism and Symbolism that is the reason this movement is so often heralded as the starting point of the avant-garde. The primary question will then be whether this mark of Expressionism tallies with Bürger's assertion that his theory of the avant-garde applies, if "with certain limitations," to German Expressionism. In other words, does that which defines Expressionism as distinct from preceding movements equate, in any part, to Bürger's theory that the avant-garde intended to sublate art into the praxis of life?

In 1906, when Kirchner wrote the first programme for *Die Brücke*, the mood was clearly geared towards the search for a new art formula. As Herbert Read claims:

Art had lost all its sanctions – its divine sanction in the service of God (for God was dead), its human sanction in the service of the community (for man had lost all his chains). [. . .] The old language of art was no longer adequate for human consciousness: a new language had to be established, syllable by syllable, image by image, until art could once more be a social as well as an individual necessity (26, 29).

Kirchner's text illustrates the birth of the early twentieth century avant-garde of Europe, the clear desire to break with the old and embrace the new, unknown, and experimental. In order to determine more about the attitude of the German Expressionists towards the status of art that prevailed at the start of the twentieth century, it is helpful to consider the successive declaration of Kirchner written in 1913 that outlines the goals of *Die Brücke*. It is true that this will yield a somewhat retrospective view, charting the history, to date, of the Expressionist movement, yet, for Kirchner, at least, the goals here still seem very much alive and relevant to *Die Brücke* in 1913. Kirchner writes: "The majority of the members of 'Brücke' is now in Berlin. 'Brücke' has retained here its intrinsic character. . . . 'Brücke' owes its present position in the art world to these goals" ("Chronik" 329). For this reason, the "Chronik der Künstlergruppe Brücke" ("Chronicle of the Artists' Group *Die Brücke*") can be classed as belonging to the genre of the manifesto.

In the *Chronik*, Kirchner talks of the desire common to all artists of the group "to derive inspiration for work from life itself, and to submit to direct experience" (328). Kirchner states that together with Heckel, he "attempted to bring the new painting and its exhibition space into harmony," furnishing the rooms of the Salon Richter in Dresden with "murals and batiks" (329). The artist, Müller, is spoken of as a natural member of *Die Brücke* due to "the sensuous harmony of his life with his work" (329). Kirchner finally attempts to distinguish Expressionism from the, by this stage, contemporary movements of Cubism and Futurism, stating that Expressionism remains uninfluenced by the ideology of such movements and "fights for a human culture, the soil of all real art" (329).

In formulating his artistic credo, Kirchner proclaimed that now painting has

recovered its “initial freedom of movement,” having been relieved of the duty of “exact depiction” by photography, the artist is free to completely and instinctively “transpose” his “sensuous experiences” onto the canvas (qtd. in Bucheim 174). Thus, now, *pure expression* of sensuous delight, and no longer exact representation, becomes the source of all painting. This is in fact reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s observation that “for the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens. . . . Around 1900 technical reproduction had reached [such] a standard that . . . it . . . had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes” (“Work” 221). Benjamin and Kirchner are stressing, as does Scheunemann, the “significant role which the advent of photography and more generally of technical reproduction played in the radical changes in artistic techniques and the development of new art forms in the first decades of the last century” (15). The invention of photography, as André Breton remarked in 1920, “dealt a mortal blow to the old modes of expression, in painting as well as in poetry” (“Max” 177), and this fatal blow was seen by some as a liberation for the arts and the catalyst for a change in the way reality was depicted.

Faced with the diversity of Kirchner’s claims, the question becomes one of whether the predominant catalyst for change was, indeed, technology, or whether it can be found in the ideology of the Expressionists – in the intentions of Kirchner and his followers to harmonise their art with life in a reaction “against the long-established older forces” (“Gedrucktes” 328). Is the avant-garde of the early twentieth century to be defined in terms of reaction or rebellion? Another question may arise in the process of this investigation as to whether it is possible to formulate a definition in terms of both.

At this point it is useful to examine the response of the other members of *Die Brücke* to Kirchner’s *Chronik der Künstlergruppe*, which was intended to represent the views of all members of the group. According to Puchner, the manifesto was considered as a “collective” act of “self-foundation and self-creation,” designed to represent the views of a new group of people (*Poetry* 2, 70). However, Erich Heckel, one of the founding members of *Die Brücke*, commented that Kirchner’s text was “not in accordance with the facts, either in Schmidt-Rottluff’s view, or in Müller’s,

or in mine, nor did it correspond to our rejection of programmes in general, so we decided not to publish the *Chronik*" (Dube 33-34). The *Chronik* was in fact published in Berlin in 1913 against the wishes of the group who had not approved the text for publication. Kirchner had written of his followers' mutual intention to bring their work into contact with society and nature, to take art back to its roots and re-engage it with the "soil" of "human" culture. Yet this was not, it seems, necessarily an aim which the other members of *Die Brücke* aspired to or took an interest in. If they conceded adherence to a programme at all, these artists can at most be said to have shared the broader aims of Kirchner's 1906 Programme: a desire to break with the tradition of the art academy and bring together those who wished to pioneer a new art of pure expression over idea. As Mark Henshaw sees it, the goal of the *Brücke* artists was "to make visible what was psychologically hidden – hidden in us as individuals, in our social relations, in the very landscape itself (n. pag.)". Kirchner perhaps saw within such a goal a broader drive to bring together art and life, but his fellow artists did not share his vision. In light of Heckel's remark, the claims of the *Chronik der Künstlergruppe* cannot be taken to represent the common intention of the artists of *Die Brücke*. It may indeed have been Kirchner's personal intention that *Die Brücke* serve to "bring art and life together in harmony," as he confirmed in his diary, even retrospectively in 1923 (Dube 28), but, as further evaluations show, Kirchner did not speak for the whole group.

One contemporary commentator, Norbert Lynton, is keen to stress that the members of *Die Brücke* had "no theories, . . . no programme," and states that "the only thing they shared in common was a desire to act energetically, manfully. They hoped to get through to a public unable to respond to the polite and anaemic art of the academies" (36). Lynton observes that before 1911 and the group's move from Dresden to Berlin, from relative artistic isolation into the centre of German art and art politics, there was "no sign in their work of direct social comment or even of personal anxieties." Originally, the intention was no more than to assimilate all those artists who believed in "expressing" as opposed to merely emulating "that which drives [them] to create" (Kirchner, "Gedrucktes" 328). For Lynton, Kirchner's *Chronik der Künstlergruppe* was an attempt to counteract the need for the dissolution of the group – a result of the differing reactions of the members to the new situation

– by forcing or assuming a unified intention and desire.

Interestingly, Lynton also notes that part of the basis for modern Expressionism was that “the camera had . . . made straight naturalism a commonplace” (33), suggesting that Expressionism was more simply a defensive reaction to the appropriation of art’s accustomed mimetic role by another medium, than a socially or ideologically motivated movement; it was more a banding together of artists who believed they could identify an alternative role for art in the face of technological reproduction. Lynton’s evaluation is in accordance with Kirchner’s artistic credo that identifies Expressionism as a reactionary movement over and above any revolutionary intentions.

It must be said then, that, if at all, it is only the intentions of *Die Brücke* post-1911, after the group’s move to Berlin, that can be defined by commentators such as R.S. Furness as the Expressionist desire to show increasing “concern for human life, . . . for man crushed by pitiless machinery and ruthless cities,” a concern which was “far more intent and poignant than the naturalist’s depiction of social conditions” (3). In other words, to Furness, the Expressionists gave the impression of wanting to leave far behind both “the objectivity of the naturalists and the *l’art pour l’art* aspect of symbolism” in favour of a socially engaged art which was nevertheless born from “intense subjectivity” (4). This represents a belief in “the paradoxical convention that unrestrained individualism could produce universal truths,” and in the possibility that an art of abstraction could serve to bring art down to earth and reintegrate it into life (Lynton 32). As Shulamith Behr puts it, “at the heart of Expressionist theory lay the paradox that the personal ‘strivings’ and subjective expression of the artist could nonetheless rekindle utopian notions of spiritual community and identity” (9).

Yet, even post-1911, it cannot be said that the work of all members of *Die Brücke* involved social comment. Wolf-Dieter Dube writes of Heckel’s painting: “Many of the subjects of these years [1911-1944] express Heckel’s strong human sympathies, which, however, had nothing to do with social protest” (60). It was perhaps only Emil Nolde who briefly joined Kirchner’s fight for human culture and shared his concern regarding the plight of mankind. Nolde spoke of his initial goal to transform nature by “infusing it with one’s own mind and spirit” (qtd. in Dube 79), but he “did not neglect the special problems and fascinations of city life . . .

attempting to portray the essence of this seamy side of life by emphasizing its material attributes” (Dube 82). However, Nolde was soon to move on to more religious subjects. It is surprising then that, based on the wishes of such a minority, those such as Furness attribute to Expressionism such social goals. The reasons for doing so are perhaps to be found elsewhere in the Expressionist canon.

(ii) *Der Blaue Reiter*: Kandinsky

Further Expressionist proclamations originated in Munich from the parallel group of German Expressionist painters, *Der Blaue Reiter* (“The Blue Rider”). Art movements in Germany at this time still reflected the political situation prior to the foundation of the Empire in 1871. Dube writes: “the separate states had fostered the existence of isolated schools of artistic thought and practice, and trends continued for some time to be geographically diffuse. No national patterns or movements emerged, but there was a large amount of unco-ordinated overlapping” (7). In 1911, Wassily Kandinsky, co-founder of *Der Blaue Reiter*, published his *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (“Concerning the Spiritual in Art”), a collection of writings on the spiritual element in art which became one of the most decisive documents of the avant-garde. The spiritual inclination of Kandinsky and his followers set them apart from the *Die Brücke*. Kandinsky had previously been a member of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* (“New Artists’ Association”) – the aim of which was to achieve an “artistic synthesis” of internal and external experiences (qtd. in Dube 95) – but had left on the grounds that it was too conservative when it came to matters concerning the spirit. The group eventually disbanded over an article that appeared on its behalf in the journal of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* in 1912, in which Otto Fischer claimed that the new spirituality was not all about expression but also about representation, and that “a picture without a subject is meaningless” (qtd. in Dube 100). Kandinsky believed that works of art were united by their possession of a fundamental spiritual or expressive quality and could enter the realm of the purely abstract.

Many of those who found themselves in modern artistic circles at the turn of the century were influenced to varying degrees by the doctrine of Theosophy – a new sect of religious philosophy – and shared a mystical, esoteric attitude towards art in

attempting to visualise the spiritual and project this vision onto canvas. Madame Blavatzky established the Theosophical Society and set forth its theory in *The Key of Theosophy* of 1889. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky implies that Theosophy and mysticism were important to his attempts to express deep emotions in his work (32-33). Indeed, along similar lines, Benjamin writes that with the advent of photography – the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction – “art [initially] reacted with the doctrine of *l’art pour l’art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of ‘pure’ art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorising by subject matter” (“Work” 224). This would suggest that the avant-garde was not only a reaction to advances in methods of technical reproduction, but that, in its early manifestations, it reacted to such changes by advocating the accentuated autonomy and sublimation of art in the form of *l’art pour l’art*, rather than by promoting a reintegration of art into life. This differs greatly from those evaluations of Expressionism which saw it as reaching out to mankind and leaving *l’art pour l’art* far behind.

Kandinsky describes the “negative theology” of art when he writes that the higher divisions of the “spiritual triangle,” science and art, literature and music, are not only blindly atheistic, but “justify their godlessness with strange words” (30). He goes on to describe the “fetishistic” aspect of art when he writes, “despite differences, or perhaps even because of them, the various arts have never been closer to each other than in this recent hour of spiritual crisis. In each expression is the seed of an effort toward the non-representational, abstract and internal structure. . . . Consciously or unconsciously, artists are studying and investigating their material, weighing the spiritual value of those elements with which it is their privilege to work” (39). Kandinsky writes that, using colour as a means to “directly influence the soul,” painting now aspires to the condition of music which “for some centuries . . . has been the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but to the expression of the artist’s soul and to the creation of an autonomous life of musical sound” (40).

Ultimately, this goes no way in confirming Bürger’s claim that the avant-garde aimed to destroy the autonomous institution of art; the mystical tone which

Kandinsky often adopts has led commentators to interpret *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in terms of occult influences which support the elitism, exclusivity and theosophical nature of the *l'art pour l'art* concept of art. However, it could be argued that Kandinsky and his followers believed they could in fact engage with man or, as they put it, “influence the soul” through extreme abstraction and emphasis on the spiritual. Indeed, Behr writes that Kandinsky shared with Kirchner a “utopian belief in the evolutionary power of art and its ability to transform society” (9). Early on in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky in fact criticises the prevailing materialist condition of *l'art pour l'art*, writing: “This dwindling away of artistic force, is called ‘art for art’s sake’” (26). Kandinsky refers to the art of the times as a “castrated art” with no purpose other than to satisfy the greed and ambition of the artist. Nevertheless, it seems that if art was to change society it was not, in Kandinsky’s mind, going to be by means of self-sacrifice, i.e. a sublation of the artist and his work into life, but rather by assuming the role of the divine saviour of mankind.

However, it should be borne in mind that according to Kenneth Lindsay and Peter Vergo, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is in fact “the only published text in which Kandinsky makes any extended mention of Theosophy. His occult interests were evidently of limited duration” (117). Indeed, considerable changes can be noted in the second version of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* written in 1912. “On the Question of Form,” also written in 1912 by Kandinsky for the *Blaue Reiter Almanach* – a yearly publication of contributions by artists of the group – completes the development that took place with the second edition of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Here, Kandinsky can be found to remark on the fact that in modern society:

One no longer sees in this ideal [that is “absolute equilibrium” between the “abstract” (or “purely artistic”) and the “objective” (or “real”) whereby the former expresses itself in the latter and the latter serves the former] a goal to be pursued, as if the spring supporting the pans of the scale has disappeared, and the two scale-pans intend to lead a separate existence as self-sufficient entities, independent of each other. . . . Art has put an end to the welcome complementation of the abstract by means of the objective and vice versa (242).

With the use of the phrase “welcome complementation,” Kandinsky reveals his personal standpoint on the matter. What Kandinsky had heralded earlier in the year, under the influence of the theosophical convictions of some of his best friends, he

now retracts. In "On the Question of Form," Kandinsky begins to promote a balancing act between art and nature, between the spiritual and the material, between the "Greater Abstraction" and the "Greater Realism" (Haftmann 1:119). Kandinsky begins to realise that if "the abstract is deprived of the distracting support of the objective [element], . . . the spectator feels himself left hanging in mid-air. People say: Art has lost its ground. On the other hand, [if] the objective is deprived of the distracting idealisation provided by the abstract [the "artistic" element], . . . the spectator feels himself nailed to the ground. People say: Art has lost its ideal" (242, 243). Kandinsky is clearly diverging, at this point, from the *l'art pour l'art* "theology" of art; he is no longer postulating an autonomy of art, as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* would at times suggest. Neither, however, is Kandinsky postulating a purely practical art whereby the essence of art is lost to the imitation of the material. Rather, Kandinsky, by the end of 1912, is advocating an intermediate type of art; as he clarifies retrospectively in 1925 in a piece on "Abstract Art" written for the Leipzig periodical *Der Cicerone*:

If art continues to evolve as something other than a purely practical, utilitarian concern on the one hand, or an airy-fairy kind of *l'art pour l'art* on the other, its relationships with other spiritual realms and, ultimately, with the totality of "life" in the most general sense will emerge with full force. Art will then be so clearly seen as a life-giving force that our present doubts about its significance and justification will seem to us the result of an inexplicable dazzlement (512).

In 1913 Kandinsky wrote a piece on "Painting as Pure Art" which was published in the Expressionist journal *Der Sturm* ("The Storm"). In this he divides the development of painting into three periods. The first he labels "origin" and describes as the practical desire on the part of the artist "to fix the transitory corporeal element," that is, nature (331). The second, he labels "development," and talks of the departure from the practical goal of the first period to the "predominance of the spiritual element" (331). The third period he labels "goal," which he describes as "the attainment of the high level of *pure art*, whereby the remains of practical desires are eliminated" (331). Kandinsky explains that following the first period, in which naturalism flourished, the process of development (the second period) largely constitutes the state in which painting finds itself today. Impressionism, he writes, brought the departure from practical goals, and with Expressionism comes the ever-

increasing predominance of the spiritual. Kandinsky admits that it is tempting, in this second period, to “attribute exclusive significance to the spiritual element” and to neglect the importance of the first period and its relationship with the origin of art, with nature (331). Kandinsky is keen to point out that, as yet, the form of the second period is dependent on the object of the first period. He explains:

If, in looking at a picture of this period, we exclude the subject matter (nature), so that *only* the purely artistic element in the picture remains, we notice at once that the subject matter (nature) constitutes a kind of support without which the purely artistic structure (construction) collapses for lack of form. Or it transpires that, having excluded the subject matter, there remain on the canvas nothing but wholly indeterminate, accidental artistic forms (in an embryonic state), incapable of independent existence. Thus nature . . . is by no means incidental in this kind of painting, but *essential* (331).

Kandinsky concludes his piece by stating that it is possible, once we arrive at the “goal” that is the third period, to wholly exclude the practical element, but that this essential element – the subject matter – must be replaced by “an equally essential component” which can only be “construction”. Such a constructive component, he explains, “is purely artistic form, which can confer upon the painting the strength necessary for independent life, and which is able to raise the picture to the level of spiritual subject” (331).

Kandinsky echoes and summarises this “rude” schematisation of the history of art in his article on “Abstract Art”. Whilst such a retrospective piece certainly cannot be classified as belonging to the genre of the manifesto, it can serve as clarification or confirmation of the relevant declarations of the time. Kandinsky states in 1925 in the art journal *Der Cicerone* (“The Guide”):

The progress of art in general, leaving aside its more or less numerous offshoots, is a slow-moving advance, having as its point of departure purely external practical-purposive aims. The “purely artistic,” first noticeable as an almost invisible embryo, continues to develop, so that this embryo is constantly growing, until the purely artistic finally takes on a fully fledged form (515-516).

Kandinsky then characterised the intermediary period, which he sees as drawing to a close in the last few decades, in terms of “a more or less complete equilibrium between both aspects: the two spheres – the world of nature and the world of art – overlapped so as to constitute a pure unison [‘Doppelklang’]” (516). As Kandinsky sees it, in 1925 we stand on the “threshold” of the third period in the history of art –

its “abstract period”. Kandinsky goes on to talk of the “profound affinity” between the world of art and the world of nature but states that “we shall only be able to attain inner affinities . . . if we separate individual worlds from each other in the most clinical way” (517). In other words, Kandinsky is championing “external differences, internal unity” (518).

Kandinsky’s description of what he terms the “second period,” in which Expressionism must remain for the time being, echoes what Adorno has written on the ambiguous status of the autonomy of art. Adorno advocates an art that remains independent from life yet cannot exist without it. It must never completely sever its attachment, nor must it surrender its independence of movement. Art must settle for a compromise between autonomy and non-autonomy; as has been examined in the introduction, Adorno believes that “art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it its autonomy eludes it” (A.T. 6). Granted, Adorno’s understanding of practical, utilitarian, or non-autonomous art is very different from that of Kandinsky. Whereas Kandinsky is writing at the beginning of the phenomenon that is classed as the historical avant-garde, Adorno is writing after its culmination. For Kandinsky, “utilitarian” art is art that has lost its “ideal” to the function of reproducing nature (naturalism). For Adorno, purely utilitarian art is art that has lost its essence to a political, social, or purely productive function (Socialist Realism, Nazi Heroic Realism, Fascist Futurism [the “second Futurism”], or Productivism). This was either *l’art pour la vie* that negated art in the process of sublation (Productivism), or a false *l’art pour la vie* that resulted in *la vie pour l’art* – the aestheticisation of life. Those writing in Adorno’s time did not class art that only had a mimetic function (realism/naturalism) as utilitarian or non-autonomous, since it operated within the institution of art. Nevertheless, the balance that Adorno formulates is open to alternative interpretation, and can very well be used to understand the regulations Kandinsky advocates for Expressionist painting.

Writing earlier, as president of his first artistic group *Die Neue Künstlervereinigung*, Kandinsky states that the artist should pursue the “artistic synthesis” and interpenetration of his “experiences in an inner world, . . . [and] the impressions he receives from the external world, from nature” (qtd. in Dube 95). Kandinsky and Adorno differ from one another in another sense. Whereas

Kandinsky is waiting, with baited breath, for a time when painting can reach its “third period,” for a “spiritual overthrow,” when art will no longer remain dependent on “reality” or “nature,” Adorno is certain that art must never lose sight of its origins. If Adorno feels that art must go into hibernation and wait for better times, he is not waiting for a time that will be more conducive to a spiritual revolution but rather for a time that will be conducive to a practical one, in which art could once again be safely integrated into life; “sublated,” that is, in the Hegelian sense of the term. Kandinsky’s emphatic abstention from an advocacy of immediate spiritual supremacy could well explain misinterpretations of Expressionism as a move away from *l’art pour l’art* towards a more socially orientated art. Kandinsky felt art was still in its intermediate stage when it must rely on the support of a basis in the “real” world, in life. Expressionism was indeed moving away from the naturalism of the establishment, yet Kandinsky did not feel the time was entirely ripe for Expressionism to wholly relinquish its supporting basis in nature. Kandinsky saw Expressionism as having moved one step further away from nature than Impressionism had, but felt that if it assumed pure abstract expression before establishing an alternative basis in pure form, it would collapse.

It is clear that Kandinsky’s piece on “Painting as Pure Art” further serves to bring into question Bürger’s theory that the avant-garde intended a reintegration of art into life. In fact, as opposed to a critique of the autonomous status of art, it ultimately calls for a future reassertion of its validity. It also brings into question Scheunemann’s statement that “painters as well as writers showed little concern for the idiosyncrasies of aestheticism and the question of the autonomous status of bourgeois art in their comments” (19). Nevertheless, if such a reactionary and theological aesthetic theory, such an emphatic reassertion of the validity of art’s autonomous status, such a drive to overcome the bounds of life via purely artistic form, was, according to Benjamin, the initial reaction to “the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction” (“Work” 226), then Kandinsky’s revolutionary doctrine, though it might not go as far as to assert it, does not detract from Scheunemann’s fundamental theory; that being, that advances in the field of technology played a significant part in the changes in art in the early decades of the twentieth century. Even so, it must be acknowledged that artists reacted not

spontaneously, as Scheunemann would have us believe, but by intentionally championing the autonomy concept of *l'art pour l'art*. However it was that Furness arrived at the conclusion that Expressionism was a “leaving behind” of *l'art pour l'art*, and a movement towards a greater “concern for human life,” it was not through a thorough reading of the statements of Kandinsky. Certainly, Kandinsky advocated such a rapport with life temporarily, but ultimately, as Lynton confirms, Kandinsky “turned his back on the material world, or at least sought to redress the imbalance caused by the world’s emphasis on material progress by committing art to the world of the spirit” (43). Whilst Kandinsky condemned the aimlessness of the contemporary condition of “art for art’s sake,” it should not be inferred from this that he thus advocated the condition of *l'art pour la vie*, as Bürger might have it; rather, he resolved to take *l'art pour l'art* and give it an aim, a function. The function of art, for Kandinsky, became expression of the spiritual. Art assumed the condition of *l'art pour l'esprit* which many would argue is merely a form of *l'art pour l'art*, having no tangible bearing on the external world. Kandinsky may have felt otherwise, hoping for a social regeneration through spiritual awakening.

(iii) Der Blaue Reiter: Marc

The second co-founder of the Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* was the painter Franz Marc. In 1912, Marc wrote a piece entitled “The New Painting” for the art journal *Pan* in an attempt to provide an explanation of the new Expressionist movement. Marc, in line with Kandinsky, expresses a strong desire to distinguish art from nature and “reality.” Whilst he claims, as an Expressionist, to be as close to the heart of nature as the Impressionists, he states that:

There is something that is not wholly nature, but rather something that is more its domination and interpretation, whose strength emanates from a stronghold *unknown to us*: art. Art was and is in its make-up, in every period, the boldest departure from nature and “simplicity,” the bridge into the realm of the spirit, the necromancy of mankind (331).

Here, Marc supports a theology of art and bestows upon art a divine-like status. Such an elevation of art to a source “beyond our ken” somehow does not sit well with Kandinsky’s cry for Expressionist artists to obey the advice of Socrates and “Know thyself!” (Concerning 39), since surely an artist cannot truly know himself if

the source of his own craft is unknown to him. It seems that Marc elevates art to an even higher position, increasing its distance from “life” to an even greater degree, than Kandinsky, suggesting that Marc’s intention for Expressionism is far from one of “reintegrating art into the praxis of life” in line with Bürger’s theory. It was, in fact, Kandinsky who persuaded Marc to leave out any reference to Theosophy in the *Blaue Reiter Almanach* of May 1912.

A couple of years later, in March 1914, Marc wrote “Der Blaue Reiter,” a front piece for the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*. Here, not only does Marc state his admiration for the disciples of early Christianity, but his theology of art takes on a life of its own when he begins to proselytise and to write of Expressionism in an overtly religious manner: “We know that the great mass cannot follow us today; the path is too steep and too far from the beaten track for them. But a few already do want to walk with us” (330). Also for the *Almanach*, in 1912, Marc wrote *Die “Wilden” Deutschlands* (“The ‘savages’ of Germany”), making reference to himself and his fellow Expressionists as well as other German Expressionist groups such as *Die Brücke*. The “savages” were the “Fauves,” the artists belonging to the parallel movement of Expressionism in France. Here, Marc once more expresses his theology of art, stating that Expressionism in its early stages was, in its struggle for a new art, a “rebirth of thinking”:

Mysticism was awakened . . . and with it the most ancient elements of art.” The aim of this new thinking was to “create out of [the Expressionists’] work *symbols* for their own time, symbols that belong on the altars of a future spiritual religion, symbols behind which the technical heritage cannot be seen (332).

Such talk of religion seems rather absurd when considering that *l’art pour l’art* is actually, as Benjamin aptly describes it, a “negative theology,” and inserts art in the place of all things godly. Marc wants Expressionism to reject the use of all advances in technology, and to positively obscure this element of society’s heritage. The only way art can do this is to retreat into itself, as a protective measure, to spare itself a competition with photography in the rendering of an exact representation of reality. In changing its goals to such an extent, art can ensure its own survival in a world of material competitiveness. One would think that the Expressionists’ “savage” battle for a new art against an old established power with a technical heritage on its side would be hopeless, and yet Marc provides hope and motivation,

stating: "The battle seems unequal, but spiritual matters are never decided by numbers, only by the power of ideas. . . . New ideas kill better than steel and destroy what was thought to be indestructible" (332). Marc's hierarchy and distinction between art and life, nature and society, is quite clear. It would seem that neither Bürger's theory nor Furness' evaluation of Expressionism are holding up in the shadow of the *Blaue Reiter* proclamations.

However, not all commentators see it this way. Werner Haftmann feels that Marc was looking for a "greater harmony with nature" for mankind and its art, and stresses that Marc formulated his intention as an "animalisation of art" (qtd. in Haftmann 1: 120). According to Haftmann, Marc felt that animals were "embedded in the great rhythm of nature," and perhaps wished the same state of being for art (1: 121). Haftmann writes of Marc's paintings: "The profound accord of living things with their environment finds its equivalent in this [art's] magical pictorial space" (1: 122). The idea, clarified in Marc's notes from 1912/1913, is that if art liberates itself from the "sensory illusion of our ephemeral life" then this points the way for man's emancipation. Marc goes on to write that the great goal of art is "to shatter the mirror of life in order to behold being" (qtd. in Haftmann 1: 122). "Indivisible being," a "universal harmony," is what Haftmann feels Marc wanted art to exemplify and promote. The philosopher Georg Lukács, in his essay "Realism in the Balance," berates Expressionism for shattering the "mirror of life." Lukács saw a work of art as "growing out of a given society and 'mirroring' that society" (Bronner 416). However, Lukács has in mind a mirror that reflects reality as it "truly is" and not as it "manifests itself immediately and on the surface" ("Realism" 33). Thus, for Lukács, to shatter the mirror, as Marc advocates, is to shatter the objectivity and critical capacity of art, thus paving the way for subjective illusion. This is clearly not what Marc intends at this point. For Marc, to shatter the mirror is to break the illusion, not to create it. Thus, any such outcome was inadvertent. The accusations levelled at Expressionism by Lukács will be discussed in more detail in section (ix) of this chapter.

Marc's acquaintance with August Macke in 1910 was a turning point in his career. With his discovery of the "radiant independent life of colour" and his subsequent detachment of "colour from nature," Marc's pictures became "more and

more abstract" (Haftmann 1: 121,123). Yet, in 1912 Marc wrote for the journal *Pan*:

Do people seriously believe that we new artists do not take our form from nature, do not wrest it from nature, just like every other artist that has ever lived? . . . Nature glows in our paintings as it does in all art. . . . Nature is everywhere, in us and outside us (qtd. in Dube 132).

Haftmann also stresses that, even in this final phase of Marc's work, "nature and the world were not excluded, but only transposed into the wider dimension" (1: 123).

Even so, what Marc has in mind at this stage is hardly an avant-gardist reintegration of art with life; rather, it is the opposite, nature and the external world being

"transposed" into art. Haftmann quotes Marc as saying that "the subject that formerly aroused our passion now dissolves into vibrations and simple numerical relations [within art] . . . – the newly formulated laws of nature" (1: 123). Marc also writes: "We no longer cling to reproduction of nature, but destroy it, so as to reveal the mighty laws which hold sway behind the beautiful exterior" (qtd. in Dube 132).

Whilst Haftmann could be justified in claiming that Marc is calling for a union of art and nature, this union is one in which nature is translated into formulaic terms, or in other words, sublated into art. It is a harmonising of art and life in terms of an aestheticisation of life rather than a socialisation or "animalisation" of art, which is what Marc perhaps first intended. "Life," here in the form of nature, is being sublated or "embedded" into art and not vice versa as Bürger's theory stipulates. Rather than being conditioned by recording the sensations of nature, art conditions nature and submits it to its own forms. Lukács' accusation that Expressionism destroyed the objectivity and critical capacity of art, and increased its capacity for illusion, is now looking more justifiable.

Lynton gives a possible explanation for Marc's differing approaches by stating that although Marc, like Kandinsky, moved away from object-orientated art, he saw in this abstraction the possibility to reach an enlightened reengagement or "oneness" with nature, through a process of contemplation. Lynton sees Marc's "animalisation of art," whilst serving to redress man's estrangement from nature, as part of the move towards subjective expression. Marc painted his animals as "symbolic images" and "in the manner of icons" rather than naturalistically. It is possible then to see how some commentators came to conclude that Marc shared with Kandinsky and Kirchner a "utopian belief in the evolutionary power of art and

its ability to transform society” through abstraction and emphasis on the spiritual.

Looked at chronologically, there is a definite move in Marc’s thought from an “animalisation of art” to pure abstraction. In 1914, when he abandoned subject matter altogether, he wrote:

I felt the human form to be ugly from a very early stage, animals seemed to be more beautiful, purer; but in them, too, I came to discover so much that was repulsive and ugly that my depiction of them instinctively, on an inner compulsion, became increasingly more schematic, more abstract. Trees, flowers, the earth, everything revealed more ugly and repulsive sides to me every year, until now at last I have become fully conscious of the ugliness of nature, its impurity (qtd. in Dube 136).

This is in total contradiction to what Kandinsky advised for the present status of art. Looking back, Kandinsky writes that if we “exclude the subject matter [nature], so that *only* the purely artistic element in the picture remains, we notice at once that the subject matter [nature] constitutes a kind of support without which the purely artistic structure [construction] collapses for lack of form.” The feeling is that this artistic structure is “incapable of independent existence” in the present stage of art’s evolution, and thus, “nature . . . is by no means incidental, . . . but *essential*” (“Painting” 331). Kandinsky does not feel that the purely artistic yet has a “fully fledged form,” and so art must wait to enter this “third” and final period of pure abstraction. Art must hold on to its relationship with nature. Marc appears to have jumped one step ahead of Kandinsky; he cannot wait for the “spiritual overthrow” and attempts such a coup in 1914 before his mission was cut short by his death two years later.

Haftmann tries to maintain that Marc was still attempting to give “pictorial expression to . . . [the] union of the self and the world in a superordinate metaphysical vision of being” (1: 123), but it does not seem that Marc himself, “repulsed” as he was by this stage with nature, would have agreed with this. As Haftmann acknowledges, in Marc’s final sketches between the outbreak of war and Marc’s death at the front, “the objective element . . . [had] virtually disappeared,” and “abstract forms recount[ed] the profound meditations of a lonely creative mind” (1: 123). Thus, to conclude, it cannot rationally be said that the statements of Franz Marc, those of Kandinsky, or those of *Die Brücke* can be taken as an explanation for the evaluation of Expressionism as a move away from *l’art pour l’art* towards the

“reintegration of art into the praxis of life.” It has been argued that *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Die Brücke* held an “ideal of integration, . . . namely the idea of encouraging artists to abandon their isolation in favour of concerted effort” (Dube 206). In other words, by the mere formation of artistic movements these artists were demonstrating a desire to leave their ivory towers and convene socially and artistically. In sharing artistic ideas they were integrating into society to some extent, even if it was only in small artistic circles. Furthermore, Janet Lyon, in her study, *Manifestoes: Proclamations of the Modern*, emphasises the function of the manifesto in articulating group identities and enabling minorities to be heard. This would suggest that the very existence of *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Die Brücke* manifestos is evidence of a will to engage with other artists as well as society as a whole. However, from the foregoing analysis, the existence of an artistic movement, or its manifestos, is not evidence enough to prove its intention to integrate art into society. From a close reading of the proclamations of *Der Blaue Reiter* and *Die Brücke*, it is clear that they never intended a “reintegration of art into the praxis of life” in the manner that Bürger intended it. Furthermore, if they ever advocated a union of art and nature, it was only ever as a transposition of nature into the purely artistic, or as temporary measure which they adopted with a view to strengthening Expressionism before totally revoking the external world in favour of the spiritual.

(iv) Novembergruppe and Arbeitsrat für Kunst

On a very different note, once the First World War had run its course, having halted most group activity and caused many young Expressionists to despair over the futility of their spiritual onslaught, the Expressionist movement reformed into activist factions. Reportedly, these factions had the new intention of joining art to the workers’ movement. As Stephanie Barron and Wolf-Dieter Dube write, “this second generation or postwar expressionism is characterized by an emphasis on content and political and social issues” (27). Towards the end of 1918, a union of German radical visual artists formed under the name the *Novembergruppe* (“November Group”), and formulated and published a manifesto in Berlin: “Manifest der Novembristen” (“Manifesto of the Novemberists”). This is the first Expressionist statement examined so far to actually refer to itself as a “manifesto,” perhaps because

of its overtly political stance, its desire to join art to real life politics and reach out to the workers. Georg Lukács wrote that the period of the war and immediately after was one in which “the politicization of . . . expressionism was far sharper than it had been in the pre-war era” (“Expressionism” 86). The Manifesto called upon all avant-gardists to join in the regeneration of Germany in the wake of the November revolution. It called upon painters, writers, composers and architects to proclaim solidarity with the revolution and participate in the reconstruction of a new society. The group states: “our union resulted from the identity between human and artistic conviction. . . . We insist on unlimited freedom of expression and a public statement about it. We hold it as our special duty to gather all serious artistic talents and to turn them toward the public good” (“Manifest” 336).

Among those who formed part of the *Novembergruppe* were Otto Dix and George Grosz. These two artists were responsible for the founding of a new phase of German Expressionism as well as a transcendence of it. *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (“The New Objectivity”), which grew out of the disillusionment following the War and the loss of faith in abstraction, was characterised by both a concern for social truths and an attitude of satiric bitterness and cynicism. Dix and Grosz believed that in order to address the social problems that the war brought and left behind, art should no longer divorce itself from everyday experience with the pursuit of abstract ideals. The artists advocated a return to more traditional modes of representation along with direct engagement with the pressing social and political issues of the time. Indeed, the representation of Dix's *Matchseller* (1920, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart), to give one example, is much more comprehensible for its rejection of pre-war Expressionism and abstraction. The painting is a denunciation of the war in general, along with the post-war plight of veterans and the class tensions that were dividing the country at the time. Such unambiguous social commentary was unheard of in the pre-war Expressionist movement. *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* was certainly a new angle for Expressionism, as much an overturning as a new phase of the movement. In 1922 an enquiry was opened in *Das Kunstblatt* in response to the return of many artists to the representation of an objective, tangible reality. The enquiry questioned whether this new phase of German Expressionism was, in fact, just “A New Naturalism?” Max Pechstein, who joined Dix and Grosz in the *Novembergruppe*, wrote an essay, “Was

wir Wollen" ("What we Want"), which appeared as part of the Novembergruppe's book of 1919, *An alle Künstler!* ("To all Artists!"). Pechstein makes clear that *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* was not just a "new Naturalism," but a promotion of the socialisation of art. In part, it reads:

Through the socialist republic we anticipate not only a recovery of artistic relations but also the beginning of a unified art epoch. . . . Art will no longer be considered, as it has been in the past, an interesting and genteel occupation for the sons of wealthy loafers. On the contrary, the sons of common people must be given the opportunity, through the crafts, to become artists. Art is no game, but a duty to the people! It is a matter of public concern. . . . The revolution has brought us the freedom to express and to realise longstanding wishes (qtd in Rigby 34).

Following a similar trend to the *Novembergruppe* was the activist group *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* ("Workers' Council for Art"). This group produced an architectural programme in late 1918 written by Bruno Taut who wanted to unify the arts under the wing of architecture. Taut states: "Art and people must form a unity. . . . From now on the artist, as shaper of the sensibilities of the people, is alone responsible for the external appearance of the new nation." Several demands are then made for "community centres as distribution points of all arts to the people," "dissolution of the Royal Academy of Arts, the Royal Academy of Architecture, and the Royal Prussian State Art Commission," and "transformation of privileged art exhibitions into free ones" ("*Arbeitsrat für Kunst* Program" 336). The stance of these Expressionist activist groups is rather different from that of the Expressionist painters, of *Die Brücke* or *Der Blaue Reiter*.

It appears that the proclamations of such activist groups fully support the theory of Bürger in their promotion of *l'art pour la vie*, and do indeed leave *l'art pour l'art* far behind. The groups promote a reintegration of art via a "dissolution" of the institution of art whilst nevertheless preserving the non-utilitarian essence of art. However, whilst they claim to be Expressionist, their ideology is at odds with that which Expressionism espoused prior to the war. In attempting to join art to the workers' movement and promoting a union of "human and artistic conviction," of "art and people," *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* contradict the Expressionist ideology of Kandinsky and Marc by detracting from art's elitist quality. Kandinsky and Marc specifically wanted to draw distinct boundaries

between art and society or nature – between the aesthetic realm and “real” life in general – aspiring to a time when “artistic form, which can confer upon the painting the strength necessary for independent life, . . . is able to raise the picture to the level of spiritual subject” (Kandinsky, “Painting” 331), and calling for a new art that is “something that is not wholly nature,” and is, “in its make-up, . . . the boldest departure from nature and ‘simplicity’” (Marc, “New” 331). This inconsistency between the activist groups and the aspirations of Kandinsky and Marc can perhaps be explained by Shulamith Behr who states that “with the Revolution of November 1918 in Germany and the collapse of the Second Reich, such intellectuals saw the opportunity for the initiation of a new society, and the link between Expressionism and revolutionary theory became more emphatic” (8). As Barron and Dube also observe, “between November of 1918 and the elections of January 1919, many artists became politically active. Initially artists sought direct involvement through revolutionary institutions and artists’ groups that sprang up simultaneously in several German cities. Their goal was a close linkage between artists, government and common people” (26-27). So it would seem it is this rather opportunist change of focus in 1918 that led to such definitions of Expressionism as: “Expressionism is – as socialism – the same outcry against materialism, against the unspiritual, against machines, against centralisation, for the spirit, for God, for the humanity in man” (Kühn, Herbert, qtd. in Behr 9).

(v) Literary Activism: Kurt Hiller, Franz Pfemfert

It could be argued that the inconsistency between “Activism” and “Expressionism” is significantly tempered if the statements of activist writer Kurt Hiller are taken into consideration. Hiller, the publicist for a circle of Expressionists known as “Activists” from 1914 onwards, was writing long before the uprisings of November 1918 and even before the disillusioning horrors of the war potentially swayed many artists. To clarify, the contradiction between Expressionism and Activism is well explained by Max Krell in the introduction to his pamphlet of 1919, *Über neue Prosa* (“Concerning New Prose”):

Expressionism – a collective term for a complex of feelings and ideas – is not a program. There is a league of Activists, but not of Expressionists. There the goal is *Bindung* (adherence to a common

cause), here it is *Lösung* (detachment). Whatever force seeks to compel intellectuals, artists and creators to subscribe to an identical program is to be condemned. A program implies bias, obligation. Obligation means death of the self. The self: adventure of spiritual loneliness. This loneliness gives birth to the work of art (11f.).

However, Barbara Drygalski Wright puts forward an alternative opinion:

It is false and misleading to draw a rigid distinction between “true” Expressionists and “mere” activists, between artistic and political wings of the movement. Obviously many members of the movement varied in the stress they placed on one aspect or the other; but it was fundamental to the expressionist view that these aspects were inseparably interrelated (87).

Whether one agrees with Wright or not, the pronouncements of Hiller are certainly cases in point which do indeed demonstrate the proximity of activism and the purely artistic divisions of the movement. Hiller, despite being an activist, can be found to stress in his pieces of 1914 for the journal *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit*, entitled “Unwesentliches Denken” (“Immaterial Thinking”) and “Wir” (“Us”), and published in 1920 as part of Hiller’s collection *Geist werde Herr! Kundgebung eines Activisten vor, in und nach dem Kriege* (“Let the Spirit become Master! Demonstration of an Activist before, during and after the War”), that “spirit is the aim” and that the precondition for evolution is “the education towards the spirit via the spirit” (393).⁸ Such remarks are interspersed with activist philosophy:

We want change, we want to ameliorate, we want to help. We don’t feel and think psychologically any more; we feel and think politically. . . . We won’t be musical, we will be moral; we won’t contemplate, we will achieve; we will be orators, teachers, philosophers of the enlightenment, rabble-rousers, founders of religion; we will be prophets, we will be literates (393).

In accordance with Krell’s outline, such philosophy surely contradicts Hiller’s spiritual aspirations. As Hiller himself identifies in a later piece of 1915, “Philosophie des Ziels” (“Philosophy of the Goal”), published in the annual *Das Ziel* (“The Goal”): “Spirit and practice – that has formerly been an antithesis.” However, Hiller goes on to say that “today these words designate a correlative dependence,” and there is no longer “the contrast of contemplation and action, but the accord of universal will and specific achievement” (408). Hiller believes that spirit sets the

⁸ Many documents of Expressionism are only available in the German original. Unless an English version is cited, all translations are my own.

goals for practice to carry out, and that “just as the spirit requires practice in order to be fulfilled, so practice without the spirit would remain empty. . . . Practice is the arm of the spirit, the spirit is the brain of practice. . . . Both are dependent on one another, neither one can do without the other” (408).

In his essay “Author as Producer,” Benjamin describes Hiller as a “theoretician of Activism” (91). By this Benjamin meant that Hiller’s activism was revolutionary in its mentality, but not in its production, in its tendency but not in its technique. As Gerald Raunig points out in his essay “The Author as Traitor” from *Art and Revolution*: “Hiller himself tends to posit paradise more than revolution and socialism as a utopian goal” (1).⁹ Hiller writes, “Paradise is a goal, therefore goal-less; it is the legitimate site of the arts” (“Philosophie” 402). Raunig interprets Hiller’s activism as “vitalist spiritism” which involved a “hypostatization [or substantialisation] of the spirit and the spiritual” as a vital element of the life process (1). “The spirit that haunts the spiritual,” in Hiller’s notion of activism, is viewed by Raunig as “more of a holy one than Hegel’s *Weltgeist*” (1). Hiller himself defines his philosophy as “religious socialism,” and goes on to preach: “Consecrate yourselves, you spiritual ones, finally – to the service of the spirit, the Holy Spirit, the active spirit” (“Philosophie” 406). Hiller made it clear that his rarefied definition of politics was politics “in the sense of a certain functional mode or form of *Geist*, in contrast to any kind of passivity” (406); he refused to approve of any political party, promoting his own *Politische Rat Geistiger Arbeiter* (“Political Council of Intellectual Workers”) and proposing “Logokratie,” or rule of an intellectual elite (qtd. in Gruber 198). Hiller only ever propelled the intellectual and artist into government on paper.

Barbara Drygulski Wright believes that this spiritual understanding of politics was “the only level upon which most Expressionists were interested in pursuing politics at all,” and “was not to be confused with banality or practical actions of party politics” (86, 87). If politics can be understood as “applied” ethics, then the

⁹ This is a pre-release from Gerald Raunig’s book *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, to be published in September 2007 by Semiotext(e). Published in German in 2005 as *Kunst und Revolution. Künstlerischer Aktivismus im langen 20. Jahrhundert*. Translated by Aileen Derieg for Raunig’s transnational research project ‘Republicart’ on the multilingual webjournal of the EIPCP (European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, Vienna): www.republicart.net

Expressionists' version of politics was a "pure" ethics (85). Wright surprisingly extends this understanding of politics to "even the most dedicated of activists," such as *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, for whom she feels "politics did not come first" but, rather, "[the] exponents of pure activity – the artist/intellectual and the work of art or literature which he created – became vehicles for political change" (87). The idea was to revolutionise culture and society "from the top down" rather than "from the bottom up" (85). In other words, according to Wright, "the expressionist redefinition of politics was not the politicization of art, but rather the aestheticization of politics" (87). Here, Wright paraphrases Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" to describe the domination of art over politics which she identifies in Expressionist ideology. Wright equates such a fusion of art and politics to the German Neo-Kantian conviction of the "dominance of thought over being, according to which the laws of knowledge actually shaped reality" (85). This was in accordance with the Expressionist theorists' belief in a "clear subordination of nature to spirit" (85). The best example of this tendency is perhaps illustrated by another self-styled activist, Ludwig Rubiner, in his essay "Der Dichter greift in die Politik" ("The Poet Intervenes in Politics"). As Wright describes it, Rubiner is advocating "a kind of living canvas or living theatre in which the men and women of the masses have become the ultimate artistic medium" (106, fn. 22).

Raunig contrasts Hiller's activism with an alternative branch of literary activism which grew up prior to the First World War and, though it is not generally referred to as activism, was much "more politically and pointedly active than Kurt Hiller's circle" (2). Raunig is referring to the protagonists of the weekly Expressionist periodical *Die Aktion* ("The Action"). From the start its publisher and editor, Franz Pfemfert, "linked Expressionist literature and contemporary cultural politics with (historical) social-revolutionary texts to form a singular combination" (Raunig 2). Until 1913 *Die Aktion* had been a gathering point for those who would later become associated with Hiller's activism, but Pfemfert grew to reject Hiller's spiritist ideas and his pacifist logocracy (the revolution of words) and put an end to the collaboration in the periodical's third year. Whilst Hiller's activists continued to invoke the "party of the German spirit" ("Philosophie" 404), by 1915 Pfemfert had

founded the Anti-National Socialist Party Group of Germany (ASP), and by the time the First World War was over “*Die Aktion* was mostly non-literary and politically more and more sectarian” (Barnouw 227). In conclusion, the whole range of German literary activism is extremely extensive, being fed, in the rough outline of Raunig:

From a right-wing activism of the spirit, which sometimes slipped into the margins of . . . proto-fascism, as well as from a left-wing activism of the ‘Aktion’, which from its basis as a literature magazine became increasingly radicalised and turned into an agitation platform for radical leftist politics (4).

So it is clear that, even prior to the First World War, some evidence may be found within the range of German Activism for an interpretation of Expressionism as an attempt to join art to the praxis of life, namely to the political sphere. Indeed, I would class Pfemfert’s *Die Aktion* alongside *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* as a group that can be used to support Bürger’s theory. However, there is perhaps more significant evidence to suggest that the call to reintegrate art into life was referring more to “life” in the abstract than to anything at all substantive, to spiritual life as opposed to the praxis of life. As Raunig mentions, Benjamin presented Hiller as “a classic example of a purportedly leftist intellectual tendency that was actually counter-revolutionary” (1). Hiller in fact had no intention to bring the poet down to the level of the proletariat. Change at the expense of the artist’s position within society was not championed beyond the level of the aesthetic. The vast majority of artists in the era of Expressionism were not ready for their own sublation and never played a substantial political role. Indeed, if a little too extreme, Wright extends this majority to include Pfemfert along with the artists of *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, making an exception only for those few individuals involved in the setting up of the short-lived Munich Soviet Republic in 1918, such as Kurt Eisner, Erich Mühsam, Gustav Landauer, and Expressionist playwright and Communist politician, Ernst Toller. Toller was prepared to subordinate his art to the demands of party politics and regarded drama as “a means of propaganda in the service of the revolution” (Gruber 187). In 1920, in an article for *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit*, Toller wrote: “I considered the drama [*Die Wandlung*] as a broadsheet and handbill. . . . [I gave readings of the play] with the intention of . . . inducing the reluctant to march, . . . and of winning them all for essential and detailed revolutionary labour” (46-47; trans. Gruber 187-188). Wright

perhaps takes the extreme position she does because, as Dagmar Barnouw points out whilst referring to Pfemfert's activism, "the problem of the intellectual as a cultural-political leader in times of profound social change is . . . difficult to come to terms with" (228). Paul Pörtner echoes Wright's opinion when he states: "[The German writers'] only *political* contribution [was] the revolution in Munich 1918-19. . . . [The Munich revolution was] the only one which proceeded from the literary to the political level" ("Writers" 140, 142).

According to Hiller, the man of letters is "the prophet, the Führer" of the people, and is by no means answerable to them or subject to their domination. The artist is still very much autonomous in the eyes of Hiller and his activist circle. Many Expressionists, Hiller clearly amongst them, were greatly influenced by the existentialist philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche which heralded the individual as a self-determining agent unanswerable to external laws or reason. It is partly for these reasons that Raunig describes Hiller's activism as having "proto-fascist" tendencies. Furthermore, Lewis Wurgaft's study seeks to demonstrate how "the commitment of these [Expressionist] intellectuals to democracy and to socialism in the Weimar era was qualified by their elitist tendencies" and how "[Hiller's] notion of activism was employed to 'existentialize' politics" resulting in a break down of the "conventional distinction between radical intellectuals of the left and right" (3).¹⁰ However, although Hiller might not have wanted to sacrifice the elevated status of the artist in the name of revolution, it seems that the will was there to engage with society, to "change," "ameliorate," and "help" society through art, albeit an art that remained "removed." For Hiller, if art and life are to engage, this can only happen on the artist's terms, that is, on the artistic plane. Thus, art consumes life in an activism of the spirit, and, in Bürger's words, the "false sublation of autonomy" occurs (see Brecht's notion of "false" socialism, Introduction 16). However, Bürger does not seem willing to acknowledge that the avant-garde might have ever actually intended such an illusory reconciliation of art and life, but merely that such a state of affairs occurred against the best intentions of the movements. Whether Hiller intended to

¹⁰ "Political Existentialism," or "Decisionism," is a doctrine which holds that individuals or political bodies determine the validity and authenticity of moral or legal precepts. The doctrine was influenced by subjectivist and irrationalist views, and promoted the use of intuition and myth in attacking the restrictions of a rationalist approach to social and political thought. See Wurgaft, p. 91.

delude his audience, or had right-wing tendencies, is open to debate, but it is not possible to conclude from this analysis that Hiller intended to reintegrate art into the praxis of life in the socialist manner that Bürger's theory suggests; that is, via a revolution of the people against the segregation of bourgeois society rather than by means of a revolution of the spirit. Nevertheless, Hiller's statements do support the notion that the avant-garde was led by ideological motives rather than materialistic changes, and thus bring into question Scheunemann's theory.

A distinction emerges in this section between practical party politics and spiritual or theoretical politics, between an applied politicisation of art and an ideal politicisation of art. The former is an immediate and tangible activism; the latter is an eternal activism operating outside the time frame of practical party politics. Hiller's "activism of the spirit" is clearly to be classed as operating within the latter political sphere; Pfemfert's activism, along with that of *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, do not fit so obviously into one sphere or the other and there is thus some disagreement as to how they are to be classed. According to Wright, the latter definition of politics should not be described as an ideal politicisation of art, but rather as an "aestheticization of politics" (87), that is, in both instances, a synthesis of art and politics that took place outside the sphere of practical party politics. Both terms might be subsumed under the definition: an aesthetic politicisation of art. This demonstrates how easily an ideal politicisation of art could slip into an aestheticisation of politics. Bürger would refer to the ideal politicisation of art as a false politicisation of art, as a "false sublation" of art into the praxis of life (54). This explains why Pörtner feels that the majority of Expressionist groups made no political contribution at all. The ideal politicisation of art could be interpreted as the attempt to reintegrate art into intellectual or spiritual life, but not into the *praxis* of life in line with Bürger's theory. This was a theoretical activism of the spirit and not an applied activism. Throughout this thesis the distinction between the practical politicisation of art and the ideal politicisation of art will be subsumed under the distinction between the politicisation of art and the aestheticisation of politics.

(vi) Literary Expressionism: Pinthus

Although German literary Expressionism was not a movement in the strict

sense of the word, it will be useful at this point to contemplate a selection of “non-activist” statements belonging to Expressionism’s literary sphere, in the hope that they will provide clarification with regard to the nature of Expressionist ideology. In 1915, Kurt Pinthus, literary critic and co-editor of the Expressionist series *Der Jüngste Tag*, wrote “Zur jüngsten Dichtung” (“On the most recent Creative Writing”). Though not an Expressionist writer himself, Pinthus was in constant contact with many of the Expressionist authors and poets, and was an arbiter and outrider of the movement. Pinthus at first observes how the most recent writers “rose to spirituality out of despair over sensuality” and were thereby “fortified” by it (68). For, he feels, there is an abyss that “gapes between the true nature of man and his self-made reality” (72). “Reality,” Pinthus writes, “shall not only be understood as the world of appearance, of nature and the bodily physical scenery of the cities we created and which surround us and the technique forming products, but especially the maze of our social, cultural, political, economical relationships and institutions” (70). Pinthus explains how in the past writers considered it essential to accentuate the details of the appearance of reality and thus allowed art to be “transcended by social tendencies” (69). Now, however, the “new writers” have seen the necessity to accentuate the totality as opposed to the detail – to express and not to represent, and thus to exclude the possibility of social tendencies. As Pinthus writes, in response to Werfel’s insight that “the world starts in the human being,” “we don’t want to project the microcosm into the world, but the macrocosm into the microcosm” (70); that is, Expressionism is not about projecting man and his art into the world, rather it is about projecting the world into man’s art. In Benjaminian terms, Pinthus’ notion of Expressionism involves an aestheticisation of the praxis of life as opposed to a socialisation of art. The essential tenet is that art is no longer to be dictated to by society; if the two are to remain in a relationship, it is art that should wield the power. This is in direct contrast to Bürger’s theory of the avant-garde which defines the intention of the avant-garde as the return to a pre-reflective unity of art and life via the projection of the microcosm of art into the world, and sees the reverse – the projection of the world into the microcosm – as a false synthesis, in which “literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and becomes one of subjection [and delusion].”

Pinthus, then, “with germinating insight,” goes even further in deciding, along with the youngest writers, that it is senseless to give the pretence of any real relationship between art and reality. Rather, in accordance with his intellectual counterparts in *Der Blaue Reiter* group, he would like to clearly demarcate the two. Pinthus writes, “reality and art are deemed to be dependent and conditional, but, to formulate it most sharply, they exclude each other” (“Dichtung” 70). Pinthus then goes further than his counterparts in questioning how the reality that “lures our senses” and is, in fact, “completely foreign” to us, can actually have anything in common with the art of Expressionism which “flows completely out of ourselves, which lives completely in the idea . . . [and is] the creation and work of our emotions, mind and will” (70). Kandinsky and Marc both acknowledge that nature is the original source and support of their art (Kandinsky, “Painting” 331; Marc qtd. in Dube 132). Pinthus states that it is the common will of the most recent writing to free itself totally from reality via a domination (the projection of the macrocosm into the microcosm) and subsequent shedding (the dropping of the macrocosm by the microcosm) of this reality. An analogy is made between the art of the past and the Greek god Atlas who is traditionally depicted as carrying the earth on his shoulders. Likewise, Pinthus saw the art of the past as straining under the great burden of what it saw as its duty to serve as a mimetic tool with which artists could imitate reality. Ultimately, Pinthus is championing the condition of *l’art pour l’art*, of art for the sake of nothing but itself, where art assumes the “real” status of the external world.

However, Pinthus’ work takes on a change of character when he states that it has been identified by certain artists – Kandinsky would be one of them – that the conflict between the intellect and reality, if pushed too far, resulted in the intellect vanishing “into nihilism” while “every bridge between the intellect and reality collapses” (“Dichtung” 76). Pinthus explains how, in any case, very few young poets managed to escape from reality, so omnipotent was the imagined reality. Gradually the young writer, overwhelmed by “the magnificent mechanism of the great states, great cities, great technical and economical possibilities,” is “dragged into the might of the crushing turbine, the control over which mankind has lost” (73). As a result, Pinthus writes, “the motto ‘*l’art pour l’art*’ remained, at all times, more a slogan of the resentful than a practical poetic recipe,” since most of the young writers

could not live up to the requirements of such a revolutionary aesthetics (73). Pinthus elaborates that:

The will of the most recent poetry was initially an intellectual fight against the imaginary reality. . . . But, the insight, that a complete dissolution into the intellectual results in indifference and nihilism, led this poetry, after the conquest of the world [i.e. the aestheticisation of life], . . . into the empire of ethics. . . . One could say: The mind obtained in the fight with reality . . . sets the ethical as a necessity for the control of reality and the bond . . . to isolated humanity (78).

Pinthus' realisation that "a complete dissolution into the intellectual results in indifference," appears very similar to Adorno's observation, examined in the Introduction, that art's "other" must be sensed in order to avoid "the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference" (A.T. 6). Due to the fact that the most recent poetry of German Expressionism works on an "intellectual and ethical unity," Pinthus finally, and not without significance, concludes that Expressionist poetry "points in the direction of the political" (79). Poetry, remarks Pinthus, which conscientiously strives to destroy an inadequate external reality, and to replace it with "nature, heart and nerve," becomes so aware that it becomes "political poetry," and not just of ordinary politics but of a "higher kind" of politics because "it does not strive for the overthrow and victory of political parties and people, but for a policy of mankind," an alternative *Weltanschauung*, or "outlook on life," by means of which the chaos in art and in the cities can be contained (78). Thus, and perhaps here Pinthus finally explains the nature of the humanist and socio-political goals of Hiller's activism, "manifestos and programmes . . . tried to ignite blunt and hardened hearts" (78).

The series of events that Pinthus describes in fact correlates to Benjamin's view of the way things evolved in the wake of advances in mechanical reproduction. As has been mentioned, Benjamin writes that art initially reacted to the invention of photography "with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*". What should not be overlooked at this point is that Benjamin then goes on to say that art later "begins to be based on another practice – politics" ("Work" 226). Although Benjamin's materialist reasons for identifying a movement towards *l'art pour la politique* differ from the ideological ones of Pinthus, both writers agree on the sequence of events, which started with a pre-reflective *l'art pour l'imitation*, progressed to the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, but

finally resulted in *l'art pour la politique*. Of course, Pinthus' understanding of *l'art pour la politique* differs from that of Benjamin, Pinthus imagining a "higher kind" of politics, akin to Hiller's rarefied, ideal definition, than that of political parties and legislators. Pinthus' concept of *l'art pour la politique* still struggles to free itself from the *l'art pour l'art* concept of art, whereas Benjamin's concept can be freely equated to the doctrine of *l'art pour la vie*, or "*l'art pour l'homme*" to use Haftmann's phrase: an art which "leaves the realm of aesthetics" and gives up "aesthetic mastery of the world" to become an activist, "militant art" campaigning for a socialist reintegration of art into human life (78-79).

Ultimately, Pinthus' work, "On the most recent Creative Writing/Poetry," goes a little way in providing a more decisive notion of Expressionist ideology. It strongly suggests that the essence of Expressionism is, in the words of Raunig, "vitalist spiritism," and that any practical activist divisions were more a compromise in light of the times than a moderation of ideology. It underlines the fact that the intentions of artistic movements, especially in times of social and political flux, have a tendency to reflect the movement of the times and to fluctuate themselves. Despite the necessity for the shift in the goals of the German literary Expressionists in the wake of the collapse of "every bridge between reality and intellect" and the subsequent "freezing" of the intellect (Pinthus, "Dichtung" 76), their ideology cannot, on the evidence examined until now, be used to support Bürger's notion that the avant-garde had the intention of reintegrating art into the praxis of life. Having such an intention is very different from supporting a less autonomous – or more "social" – form of art for pragmatic reasons, merely because it proves impossible to survive in isolation. Scheunemann's theory holds up a little more than Bürger's in light of Pinthus' testament to Expressionism, since, although it seems that many artists did indeed concern themselves with the issue of the autonomy of art, many of them appear to have done so in reaction to the feeling of "defencelessness" and "lack of protection" on being plunged at the start of the twentieth century into the "world of new [technological] miracles," the "swirling and confusing colours, sounds and shapes of the streets, landscapes, cafés and palaces of enjoyment, of the enigmatic factories, machines and [new] possibilities of movement" (Pinthus, "Dichtung" 69). That is, they "rose to spirituality" (adopted a theology of *l'art pour l'art*) in their

retreat from the over-stimulating, modern material world. This is in contrast to Kirchner's claim that the artists of *Die Brücke* felt liberated by modern technological developments – which relieved them of their duty of exact representation – and, through “pure expression,” came to “bring art and life together in harmony.”

In 1919 Pinthus went on to write another document of Expressionism, an anthology of Expressionist poetry entitled *Menschheitsdämmerung* [“Dawn/Twilight of Humanity”]. Here, he confirms that although this poetry is in a sense “political poetry, for its theme is the condition of contemporary humanity, which it laments, curses, disdains, destroys while at the same time seeking in terrifying outbursts the possibilities of future change,” this cry is often misunderstood, because the “the best and most passionate of these poets fought not against the external conditions of humanity but against the condition of the mutilated, tormented, bewildered human being himself;” it is only in this way, adds Pinthus, that “political poetry can be at the same time art” (34). Just as Pinthus wrote in 1915 of Expressionist writing becoming a “higher kind” of politics, he now again stresses the “super-political importance” of Expressionist poetry (34). This is a poetry in which “social aspects are not presented in realistic detail, are not depicted objectively as, e.g., slum art, . . . but they are always directed toward the universal, toward the great ideas of humanity” (35). Pinthus continues that, though the war “crushed many of these poets,” others continued to represent the war “as vision, . . . as a universal horror”, and not in a ‘matter-of-fact realistic way” (35). Admittedly, Pinthus does state that this poetry spurned “aesthetics and the principle of *l’art pour l’art*” in its decision to embrace “social aspects” (35). However, I would argue, as does Benjamin of Hiller, that the artist is still very much autonomous in the eyes of Pinthus and of the poets he represents, and that Expressionist poetry was actually countering a politicisation of art in its passive “super-political” approach. Bürger’s theory is once again insupportable and Scheunemann’s slightly weakened in light of the fact just noted that artists were not so much reacting directly to “external” advances in technology, as fighting against the human predicament amidst these multiplying cogs – “the mutilated, tormented, bewildered human being himself.”

(vii) Literary Expressionism: Flake and Schickele

Written in the same year as Pinthus' *Zur jüngsten Dichtung* is Otto Flake's "Von der jüngsten Literatur" ("On the most recent Literature"), published in the literary journal *Die Neue Rundschau* ("The New Review"). Flake, an Expressionist writer and critic, describes Expressionism as being "different from impressionism through its longing for total emotion, by means of increased 'spirituality,' that means abstraction, and by means of greater geniality, that means more central and deeper lying emotion" (186). In surmising how the new literature behaves in relation to the "old German totality," Flake states that "conversely to the old Germany spirituality, [the new one is] not moral, but vitalistic [i.e. arising from something non-material], dependent on energy [i.e. the non-material "vital spark," "soul," or "spirit"]" (186). Flake praises the work of René Schickele, calling him the "strongest" of the Expressionist writers in his "drive for abstraction" and describing each of his works as an "onslaught" (186). Schickele, Flake explains, wanted to throw us into "the initial state of our soul, the chaos," in order to make us realise that "our practical life, the state, family and each organisation, are not gods and laws above us, but are helping means of human necessity; thus, we not their slaves, we are the masters" (187).

However, Flake changes tone when he goes on to say that at a certain point the Expressionists "atrophied," their military advance towards "internal anarchy" became an impotent "stagger," that is, "Schickele's rush towards the chaos . . . is fanatically great and strong, but when he reaches the chaos, the offensive collapses" (187). Flake records this as "one of the most disillusioning moments I experienced in literature" (187). Writing of the young men in the new literature circles, Flake, in the same vein as Pinthus, talks of encountering "premature judgements and an over-estimation of their own spirituality, the complete expression of it in articles, the attacking of polemics with it" (187). Flake concludes that the German "totality," in the end, "remains ethically oriented" and that whilst it is not necessary to be a "mere moralist" and undesirable to be "*a priori* ethical," "we can never throw off the central event in ourselves, the German process of the great overview, justice and kindness [i.e. morality and practicality]" (188).

Flake clearly has a lot of respect for several Expressionists and has no

intention to detract from what Expressionism has achieved, but he is ultimately a traditionalist in awe of the likes of the moralist, Tolstoi. It becomes clear to Flake that to renounce morality is to cut the physical roots upon which this new spiritual art depends. For Flake, a literary opposition is conceivable that is “at the same time aesthetic and political, bourgeois and of the common people” (182). In developing a new way in which life is to be perceived, Flake is suggesting a tempering of the over-ambitiously abstract and spiritual angle of the young Expressionist writers. Flake is making the point that although we must not be slaves to the practical, neither must we get carried away with a spirituality that results in a collapsed offensive.

The following year Expressionist poet René Schickele responds to Flake’s article in his “Reply to Otto Flake” of 1916 published in the Expressionist literary journal *Die Weissen Blätter* (“The White Papers”).⁴ Schickele’s description of initial Expressionist intention is much in line with Flake’s. Schickele states that Expressionist literature “meant above all the wish to put aside the portrayal of a moral will; it is aggressive; it is radical; it hurls art, which in and since the classics lead a private life, through the streets – even at the risk of it being destroyed there” (189). When Schickele talks of “hurling art through the streets,” he is not speaking of an attempt to throw art back into life, but is merely speaking figuratively of a revolutionary art which will over-turn traditional aesthetic concepts. To diverge from “a moral will” can imply a total disengagement from society – an increase in spirituality – as well as a total submergence into life and loss of abstraction.

However, Schickele, having reconfirmed the original goal of Expressionism, goes on to fight the bourgeois backtracking of Flake, inferring him to be a “coward,” who has not understood the true essence of Expressionism and will “at the first opportunity begin the trading of the opportunistic attitude again” (189-190). Schickele questions the supremacy of the classics, of Bach and Goethe, suggesting that it is indeed possible to surpass them or have an equally successful breakthrough. Schickele is ultimately attacking the bourgeois complacency of Flake and his unwillingness to see that Expressionism will not concede defeat and can push for pure abstraction without having to compromise itself in the “portrayal of a moral will” (189). For Schickele, victory means “when the mind becomes power” (190). Schickele wants extreme spirituality at any cost, art as spirit and emotion above any

“function” or “social aspect” of art that links it to the physical realm; he sees art as a reflection of the mind and that any accompanying reflection of the body detracts from this. Writing as a bilingual Alsatian – Alsace had links to both France and Germany – amidst the Franco-German rivalry of the First World War, Schickele became known for his pacifist discourse. Schickele could never have condoned an art that assumed an activist or militant role and thus wanted to steer clear of an ethically-oriented art that could lead in this direction.

Flake and Pinthus agree that at a certain point, once they decided upon the futility of their efforts, some writers of Expressionism became more practically and politically focussed, less extreme in their fight for abstraction. But, as Schickele implies, this was not the original intention of Expressionism, and such artists were straying from the “true” aims of the movement, often influenced and disillusioned by the brutalities of the First World War. Schickele’s argument could be used to support Scheunemann’s theory rather than Bürger’s in that the desire for art to lift everything above the real could have been a sign of reaction to mechanical reproduction which had perfected and taken over the role of imitation of the real. Flake’s claim that some artists resumed a relationship with the real once they became disillusioned by their failed attempts to rise above it, suggests that although Expressionism might indeed have begun as a reaction to, and retreat from, advances in technology, it ended in the sombre realisation that it was impossible to escape the grasp of the modern industrial world and that art would have to relinquish abstraction and find its place within that world despite having been ousted from its accustomed position by photography. Flake suggests that Expressionist writers did at one point intend to reengage their art with the praxis of life, and yet such writers never intended a “sublation” of art via an abolition of the institution of art in the manner of Bürger’s theory. This was a union of art and life that was closer to an aestheticisation of society and politics than a socialisation, or politicisation, of art, as with Pinthus’ proposal to engage with a “higher kind” of politics. This was an ideal politicisation of art, akin to Hiller’s theoretical activism, as opposed to an engagement of art with practical party politics.

(viii) Literary Expressionism: Edschmid

The final submission for examination is the work of one of the literature movement's leading writers and prophets, Kasimir Edschmid. The statement is entitled "Expressionismus in der Dichtung" ("Expressionism in Creative Writing/Poetry") and was published in *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1918. As has been determined, German literary Expressionism was not self-conscious or self-critical, and it had no clear, purposeful programme for its sympathisers to follow. Rather, it was a *Weltanschauung*, or "conception of the world," which gave rise to preferences for certain techniques and subject matter. In the words of the poet Iwan Goll: "Expressionism . . . was not the name for an artistic form but of a particular attitude. It would be much more the sense of a *Weltanschauung* than an object of art's necessity. . . . L'homme pour l'homme instead of the former l'art pour l'art" (Goll 108). In line with such a notion, Edschmid writes of the new art: "it required an actual reorganisation of the artistic world. A new *Weltbild* ["world-view"] no longer participated in production that could be seized by the Naturalists" (Edschmid 96). In other words, a new *Weltbild* had to be created that was completely different from the Naturalists perception of the world. Edschmid continues, "the earth is an enormous landscape, that God gave us. It must be looked after in such a way that it comes unspoilt to us. Nobody doubts the fact that the genuine cannot be other than as reality appears to us. Reality must be created by us" (96). That is, the *Weltbild* Edschmid has in mind is one in which reality can be understood through direct experience. The whole range of the Expressionist artist's vision is then summarised with the words,

He does not see, he beholds. He does not describe, he experiences.
He does not represent, he forms anew. He does not accept, he seeks.
Now there is no longer a chain of facts: houses, factories, sickness,
whores, screams and hunger. Now there is the vision of these things.
The facts are only significant in so far as the hand of the artist reaches
through them to grasp what lies beyond. He sees what is human in a
whore, what is divine in a factory. He weaves the individual
phenomenon into that great pattern, which goes to make up the world
(96).

Here, Edschmid is definitely aiming for something along the line of Gottfried Benn's concept of *Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung*, that is, a destruction of *external* reality. Emphasising his wish to attack all that is mere superficial external appearance,

Edschmid writes,

A whore is no longer an article, bedecked and painted with the decorations of her profession. She will appear without perfume, without colours, without bag, without swaying thighs. Her actual nature must come out from that [image]. Her hat, her gait, her lips are surrogate (97).

Edschmid wants to stress the fact that Expressionist artists should be aiming for the “kernel,” the “core,” the “crux” of the matter, and not for the “lips” of the whore which are merely a substitute for her true nature, her “*Dasein*.” Edschmid feels that “the world is there” and that it would thus be “senseless to repeat it” with brushes or words. It makes more sense for the revolutionary artist to focus on the fundamental, central, and critical feature of his subject matter.

Kurt Pinthus actually makes reference to Edschmid in his aforementioned 1915 piece and praises Edschmid’s “virtuous” talent for story-telling, as is exemplified in his Expressionist novellas “The Six Mouths.” Pinthus describes the way Edschmid “scrapes off the sequins of the reality, the shavings fly and, defenceless, the being is movingly unveiled” (“*Dichtung*” 76). Pinthus is referring here to Edschmid’s success in converting the “lips” of the whore, as it were, into the “core” of the whore, in transforming appearance into expression, in peeling away external reality and substituting it for spiritual essence.

As Pinthus recognises, Edschmid succeeded in the conversion to *l’art pour l’art* through prose, where many young poets failed. Edschmid’s merciless hacking away of reality leaves the spirit stripped, exposed and “defenceless” (“*Dichtung*” 76). Nothing of reality is left in Edschmid’s art, no social aspect missed or left standing. It seems that Edschmid confirms the view of Schickele as opposed to that of Flake or Pinthus: there is in fact no need for Expressionism to backtrack, to become more moderate or “opportunistic” in its callings, for such high aspirations do not necessarily end in “disillusionment,” “collapse” or “atrophy” (Flake 187). As Pinthus also acknowledges, Schickele too succeeded in “the conversion” and in the “resolving of reality through the spirit.” In Schickele’s art the rules of reality no longer apply, the “impressionistically composed environment visibly vanishes here . . . the sensuous swells up to the fantastic, the bourgeois feeling grows to celestial intensity, the act dwindles and the connection with the absolute, the universal, greatly increases” (“*Dichtung*” 76). From a reading of the statements of Edschmid and

Schickele, it would seem that Bürger's theory cannot be applied to any degree to German literary Expressionism.

(ix) Conclusion

Ultimately, the content of the "non-activist" proclamations of the Expressionist literary movement can certainly be said to confirm the understanding of Expressionist ideology as the belief in an accentuation of *l'art pour l'art* as opposed to an implementation of *l'art pour la vie*. The pronouncements of the Expressionist writers are certainly more in line with the anti-naturalist tendency of the statements of the groups of Expressionist painters – *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* – than with the tendency of those of some their activist counterparts – *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* along with the *Aktion* group – to propose bringing art into the service of society and politics. Indeed, some critics and writers of Expressionist literature – namely Pinthus and Flake – came to advocate bringing art back down to earth, but such ideas seem to have been ridiculed by the writers most loyal to the initial goals of Expressionism – Schickele and Edschmid – and seem to come closer to an aestheticisation of the praxis of life rather than a socialisation of art. Edschmid's conviction that the hand of the Expressionist writer, having been "freed" from its duty of exact representation of the visual, should strive to reach beyond the mere appearance of things, can be equated to Kandinsky and Marc's belief that the Expressionist painter should concern himself with building a "Brücke" into the realm of the spirit. These foundational, purely artistic Expressionist groups of painters and writers ultimately share an urge for an artistic *Wirklichkeitszertrümmerung* and, to use Krell's distinction, a goal of "detachment" from the praxis of life as opposed to one of socio-political "adherence."

If it is common among critics and commentators such as Furness to highlight Expressionism's "leaving behind" of *l'art pour l'art*, this only applies to non-activist Expressionism in-so-far as certain painters advised that any assumption of *l'art pour l'art* was premature (Kandinsky, "Painting" 331), and certain writers came to compromise after failing to "escape reality," the "pitiless machinery and ruthless cities," and were themselves "dragged into the might of the crushing turbine" (Pinthus, "Dichtung" 73). According to Pinthus, a true Expressionist should not

concern himself with the “external conditions of humanity,” but should attempt to reach through “reality” – nature and society – to the spirit. The notion is that Expressionist literature should aspire to present itself as pure form, any representational content being a vestige of the despised “real” realm, of appearance and society. If non-activist Expressionism were to change society at all it would be indirectly, via an awakening of the human spirit. Ultimately, the original contention of Expressionist painters and writers was that the “human community can only be effected by a quantum leap inspired by the transformation of individual human beings” (Ratych et al. 8). This was an accentuation of *l’art pour l’art*, a condition of art which Benjamin saw as culminating in the aestheticisation of the praxis of life.

Having established the approach of the painters and writers of Expressionism, of the activist and non-activist groups, it is necessary to consider the political and social implications of Expressionist intention. Presumably referring, in the main, to the non-activist groups of Expressionism, which formed the majority of the movement, the Communist philosopher Georg Lukács contended that Expressionism “in its attempt to create an irrational utopia paved the way for the infamous myths of Nazism” (paraphrased in Ratych et al. 5-6). Such a contention arose despite its rather abductive reasoning, and despite the fact that Expressionism was generally accepted to be “the literary expression of the ideology of the USPD [the German Independent Socialist Democratic Party],” since “as an opposition from a confused anarchistic and bohemian standpoint, [it] was naturally more or less vigorously directed against the political right” (Lukács 77, 87). In 1934 Lukács’ essay, “Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline,” sparked a controversial debate amongst German Marxists regarding the relationship between Expressionism and Fascism. In addition to its attempt to determine the road that socialist art and culture should take, the debate also reflected “the intellectual re-evaluation of the cultural forces that helped lead a civilized nation to turn towards barbarism” (Bronner 413). Lukács wrote:

Expressionism stands on an irrational and mythological foundation; its creative method leads in the direction of the emotive yet empty declamatory manifesto, the proclamation of a sham activism. . . . [The expressionists’] creative method needed no distortion to be pressed into the service of fascist demagoguery (“Expressionism” 112-113).

Lukács’ essay led author Bernhard Ziegler (pseudonym of Alfred Kurella) to

a similar conclusion in his “Nun ist dies Erbe zuende . . .” (“Now the Legacy has come to an End . . .”) which appeared in *Das Wort* in 1937: “Today we can clearly see what sort of a phenomenon Expressionism was and where it leads, if followed to its logical end; it leads to Fascism” (qtd. in Bloch 16). Lukács vilified Expressionism for its “myth-making idealism” and “escapist ideology,” which “provided a diversion from the key point of the class struggle,” championing “bourgeois realism” in its place (111, 90, 92). Lukács felt that whilst the “outward gestures and forms of expression are different,” Expressionist ideology could be equated to the ideology of the bourgeois intelligentsia in its helplessness in the face of “eternal human problems” and its “flight from their solution” into a self-created, “irrational utopia” (91, Ratych et al. 5-6). The mental flight from reality is taken for no more than a “masquerade for revolutionary action” (89). Lukács felt that the Expressionists were inextricably linked to their middle-class roots and that “the abstract and chaotic style of Expressionism ultimately exposed its class bias precisely because of its obscurantism” (Braun 274). Whilst the Expressionists consciously espoused the ideology of the USPD, which had split from the SPD in order to pursue its anti-war stance, Lukács accused them of being pacifist only in the abstract and of thus unwittingly supporting the ideology of imperialist Germany. As Benjamin believes of Hiller’s Expressionism, though it purported to be of a leftist intellectual tendency, it was actually counter-revolutionary (“Author” 92). Raunig, also with reference to Hiller’s circle of Expressionists, remarks that “sometimes their texts are marked by nationalism, are often even anti-democratic” (2). Indeed, certain “striking” exponents of Expressionism such as the poet Gottfried Benn, “ended up in Fascism” (Bloch 16).

Ultimately Lukács labelled the Expressionist movement as a “pseudo-critical, abstractly distorting and mythologizing [form] of imperialist sham opposition” which thereby became an “adaptable means for fascist propaganda” (87, 111). In other words, Lukács and his sympathisers believed that Expressionism created a “false sublation of autonomous art,” an illusory synthesis of art and life, in which life was sublated into art (Bürger 54). The notion was that this illusion created the prototype for National Socialism, Brecht’s “false article” or sham-socialism (see Introduction 16-17). Rainer Stollmann argues that fascist pseudo-socialism was reliant on the

“false sublation of the opposition between art and life,” an “aestheticised public sphere,” in order to create the illusion of an “anti-bourgeois position” (51). As Stephen Eric Bronner sees it, the Expressionist desire for artistic freedom and supremacy could have created the conditions of chaos that “fostered the barbarism which would supplant the Weimar Republic” (415). Indeed, some Nazis saw in Expressionism a heritage they could use; as Minister for Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels sought to make use of Expressionism’s programmatic distortion of reality for his own ends (Lukács, 111). Ironically, however, the Expressionists were attacked from the right as well as the left, and the National Socialists, on assuming power, condemned Expressionism as a “decadent art,” championing “heroic realism” in its place, and excoriating it as “a product of the materialistic degeneration of western democracies, polluted by pacifist, left-wing and Jewish associations, and stigmatised by its anti-patriotic stance during the Great War” (Ratych et al. 6). Indeed, the position of Franz Pfemfert’s Expressionist circle, in contrast to Kurt Hiller’s German nationalism, was “anti-national and *anti*-antisemitic” (Raunig 3). Nevertheless, as Lukács is at pains to point out, this turn-about of the Nazis’ stand on Expressionism in no way affects the possibility that it was, if often unwittingly, a proto-Fascist enterprise.

In 1938, the philosopher Ernst Bloch responded to Lukács’ essay objecting to his casting of Expressionism and Fascism in the same mould (“Discussing Expressionism” 18). Bloch focuses on the humanism of the Expressionists, demonstrating their interest in popular and folk art. Bloch criticises Lukács for limiting his sources to theoretical writings and failing to touch on the actual works of the Expressionists, especially the paintings: “nowhere is there any mention of a single Expressionist painter” (18). Bloch cites the activist painters Grosz and Dix of the *Novembergruppe* in claiming that Expressionist art was not always obscure and incomprehensible, and thus makes an argument for a definition of Expressionism which diverges greatly from that of a pre-Fascist flight from reality (26).

Since the ideology of Expressionism suffered simultaneous attack from the left and right, being substituted by “bourgeois realism” in the case of Lukács, “socialist realism” in the case of the Russian Communists, and “heroic realism” in the case of the German Fascists, it becomes difficult to come to a definite conclusion,

with regard to the social implications of Expressionist ideology. Bronner writes: "Expressionism . . . seemed to hang suspended between the major classes and the existing political formations. This is what made its political message and its social effects so difficult to decipher" (415). Wright cites Expressionism's "non-committal abstractness" as the reason why "Expressionism's political zeal could later flow in so many contradictory directions, from anarchism and revolutionary socialism to Fascism" (90). One thing which is for certain, however, is that Expressionism prepared the ground for a new aesthetic which questioned the boundaries of art and advanced a critique of bourgeois society. It is open to debate whether that critique "led to the need for proletarian revolution or rather to a call for an irrational apocalypse that would be realized by fascism" (Bronner 415).

Of course, non-activist Expressionists would like to say that there were no *direct* social implications as such, because Expressionism did not concern itself with "reality," although a revolution of the spirit or mind might in its turn affect society. Furthermore, even if many of these Expressionists were concerned with having an *indirect* impact on society, the introduction to Pinthus' *Menschheitsdämmerung* reads: "If Expressionism has achieved success as a revolution in vision and language, its other central tendency, an idealistic revolt that aimed at the total regeneration of the human being, resulted in dismal failure" (Ratych et al. 4). That is, even if Expressionism did have extra-aesthetic designs, they were ineffectual. In the aftermath of the First World War, Iwan Goll showed his disappointment with the Expressionists when he published *Der Expressionismus stirbt* ("Expressionism is Dying") in the new international avant-garde journal *Zenit* ("Zenith"): "Your Weltanschauung has succeeded nowhere. You have not saved one of the sixteen million lives" (109). This declared failure of Expressionism to impact upon society can perhaps be attributed to the fact that its aesthetic credos along with its social and political ambitions were recorded in "editorials, 'glosses' and social commentaries, in manifestos, programs and polemics" that were presented to the public through the movement's journals and magazines. These journals "endured small circulation, limited capital and an uncertain future in order to champion an aggressively avant-garde aesthetic." The major Expressionist journals *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion* "found their audience among ultra-left bohemians and intellectuals rather than in the masses

of the large labor organizations” (Bronner 415). Hence, the reception of the Expressionist ideology was limited in size and restricted to the middle-classes, thus failing to reach the majority of the population. The argument that Expressionism *failed* to promote its ideology further supports Bürger’s theory, however, it goes no way in disproving any extra-aesthetic designs or *intentions*.

The political and social implications of activist Expressionism must also be considered. *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, as they are identified by Barbara Drygulski Wright, are to be classed, with Hiller’s and Pfemferts’s literary activism, alongside the non-activist Expressionist movements of *Die Brücke*, *Der Blaue Reiter* and literary Expressionism, as never having played a “significant political role” (Wright 111, fn. 87). According to Wright, even the most dedicated of the so-called “activists” did not put politics first, and were equally guilty of a redefinition of politics that resulted in a fascist aestheticisation of politics as opposed to a communist politicisation of art. With the exception of Wright’s classification of Hiller’s activism, which Raunig also identified as “proto-fascist” (4), I find her approach too extreme. *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, along with Pfemfert’s activism, are the handful Expressionist movements that can be used to support Bürger’s theory in their genuine attempt to politicise art.

In her article, “German Expressionist Political Posters 1918-1919: Art and Politics, A Failed Alliance,” Ida Katherine Rigby focuses on how the *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, in the wake of the November Revolution, were “committed to bringing art to the people, and contributing poster designs to the socialist cause was one tangible way to place art at the service of the revolutionary masses” (34). Rigby continues:

In 1918, temporarily politicized by war and revolution, German artists cherished the illusion that the political and cultural avant-gardes, the proletariat and the radical artists could unite to revolutionize German society, and that their revolutionary styles would appeal to the revolutionary masses (35).

For the first time, the German avant-garde had a mass audience, extending beyond their usual limited, elite, art-loving, middle-class addressees. The German Socialist Government hoped that the Expressionists, with their avant-garde styles, would be able to rally the urban masses to the socialist cause. However, this was not to be the case. As Rigby concludes in light of a survey carried out by Hans Friedeberger in

1919 to assess the impact of the posters: "The workers . . . considered avant-garde styles themselves products of bourgeois culture and demanded readily recognizable realism and inspiring idealism instead" (38). The activists were criticised for "presenting too bleak a picture of the working class and thereby encouraging resignation and poor self-image rather than provoking action" (38). Thus, the union of avant-garde art and socialist politics was short-lived, having provoked only resentment, distrust, and alienation amongst the workers who felt they were being mocked by the bourgeois artists. In line with Wright's argument that even the most dedicated activists failed to put politics first, Rigby writes: "Many of the Expressionist posters seem more a manifestation of the artists' alienation and personal *Angst* than a call for action; they are unsettling rather than inflammatory" (39). In the end, the radical groups disbanded, and, disillusioned, the artists returned to the higher realms of their studios.

For the purposes of exemplifying Bürger's theory, however, the fact that the Expressionists of the *Novembergruppe* and *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* attempted to politicise their art, even for a matter of months, is sufficient. The fact that such an attempt was ultimately unsuccessful even further supports Bürger's theory that the avant-garde failed in their attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life. The same reasoning can be applied to the swift overthrow of the Munich Soviet Republic that had been established by the revolution in 1918-19. However, as Stephen Eric Bronner observes, if Expressionism had failed to make contact with the workers in 1919, by the late twenties Expressionism was being assimilated into the society and culture of the bourgeoisie: "Whatever the intentions of the artists involved, to the degree that this occurred, Expressionism became integrated into the given order and played a role in shaping the ideological and cultural climate of the period" (414). Bronner makes a case against Bürger's theory that the avant-gardist attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis life was a failure, though he acknowledges that its success was certainly limited to certain strata of society. The divisions of Expressionism that can be explained using Bürger's theory are clearly limited to these post-war activist movements, along with Pfemfert's and Toller's literary activism, but Bürger does acknowledge that it is only with "certain limitations" that his theory can be applied to German Expressionism. These limitations are far-

reaching, since, as this chapter has revealed and Wilhelm Krull affirms, “the term of Expressionism is now connected with a great number of different, sometimes even antonymous phenomena” (1). Thus, “the formulation of a compact definition is rendered . . . difficult, if not even impossible” (Krull 1). As a result, limitations must also be extended to the application of Marin Puchner’s theory to the Expressionist movement. If the content of the vast majority of Expressionist “manifestos” shows no sign of promoting *l’art pour la vie*, of being prepared to sacrifice art’s elevated status for the good of mankind, it is clear that the mere existence of such documents does not provide evidence of the avant-garde’s attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life.

Whilst it is not possible to formulate an all-encompassing definition of Expressionism either in terms of a reintegration of art into the praxis of life or an aestheticisation of politics, in terms of an involvement of artists with “applied” politics or “spiritual” politics, it is nevertheless possible to agree with Helmut Gruber that the Expressionist writers were pioneers in attempting to re-establish some form of relationship between art and the praxis of life, though “in the present thirst for revision [this attempt] is made to appear negligible” (186). I would extend Gruber’s observation to include Expressionist painters as well as those in the literary field, and use it to support my final conclusion.

The fact that those such as Wright focus on the lack of a significant Expressionist desire to participate in governmental activity in no way undermines the fact that Expressionists can be seen to mark the start of the historical avant-garde in their assumption of a political consciousness and acquisition of the will to change and impact upon bourgeois society, rather than merely critique it. Even if Expressionism had no visible impact on society, it certainly opened doors for other movements to enter society, perhaps with greater, less “negligible” consequence.

Chapter 2 – CUBISM

Following the analysis of the manifestos of German Expressionism, and having found slim evidence with which Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde can be corroborated, I will move on to consult the manifestos of the French Cubist movement. It seems that the evidence found so far can only be used to further the contemporary feeling that Bürger, in formulating his theory, neglected to take into account the intentions of key avant-garde movements, German Expressionism being amongst them. It could also be useful to keep in mind at this point, that French Cubism was also amongst those movements which Dietrich Scheunemann accuses Bürger of overlooking (7).

The evolution of French Cubism was parallel to that of German Expressionism. The Cubist movement developed between the years 1907 and 1914. Compared with the situation of the Expressionists in Germany, in France, as Wolf-Dieter Dube observes, "the forces that combined to shape developments in art were gathered in the capital, so enabling a new style to emerge in a logical and cogent manner" (7). Martin Puchner states that the movement of Cubism did not have an "explicit manifesto," but that "traces of the manifesto" can be found in some of the "paradigmatic Cubist paintings" which can be described as "'manifesto'-like" and which "at least retrospectively took on the foundational function of the manifesto" ("Art" 1). Whilst there might not have been a document of Cubism that labelled itself as a "manifesto," this chapter will focus on an analysis of the "manifesto"-like theoretical statements of the movement which have been found. Not all Cubists saw the need to issue proclamations, and when they did, those proclamations served a specific function. Whether that function was to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, in line with Martin Puchner's theory that the very existence of avant-garde manifestos supports Bürger's theory, will be determined in the course of this chapter by analysing the actual content of the Cubist "manifestos."

The Cubists, in the same vein as the Expressionists, wanted to sever the chains of naturalism, and took their lead from the Impressionists and Symbolists before them. At the start of the twentieth century, initiators of the Cubist movement were greatly influenced by the concepts behind Symbolism, however, they soon

came to rebel against certain aspects of its aesthetic doctrine, namely the dismissal of an external reality. The Symbolists, towards the end of the nineteenth century, marked an advanced stage in the development of Idealism, and had made reality completely subject to the domain of the mind. This complete retreat from the world into the mind contained a terrible paradox, for an art which took pure intellect as its source found itself not only purposeless but barren. An art of contemplation and isolation proved largely unproductive and did not survive for long before resorting to the affirmation of a new reality (Gray 11-20). Likewise, although greatly influenced by Impressionism, the Cubists did not embrace it wholeheartedly, rejecting the Impressionists' sole reliance upon the senses and their subjective depiction of the world. Cubism, like Expressionism, was a continuation as well as a transcendence of Impressionism and Symbolism.

(i) Picasso and Braque pre-1914

Although Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the pioneers of what we now call Cubism, were brought together as members of an artistic group by 1908 – *Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir* – both artists remained publicly silent with regard to their art until well after 1914. It was the privacy they maintained as “gallery Cubists” that provided them with the freedom to experiment with controversial techniques without fear of recrimination. Picasso and Braque were only exhibiting in small private galleries, unlike the derivative “salon Cubists” who were dependent on the large official state exhibitions for sponsorship. This “silence” will reduce the amount of material this study can work with, and thus essays as well as other secondary material will need to be substituted where there is a lack of documentation belonging to the genre of the manifesto.

The earliest recorded statement by a Cubist on his art is the transcript of an interview with Braque in 1908-9. The transcript was published the following year in *The Architectural Record* in New York. Resonant in Braque's statement are resemblances to the later Expressionist manifesto examined in the previous chapter, Kasimir Edschmid's “Expressionismus in der Dichtung,” written in 1918. Indeed, as Alfred Barr illustrates in his diagram for the jacket of the exhibition catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Cubism, rather than Expressionism, is often considered to

be the seminal art movement of the historical avant-garde and is said to have opened the door for subsequent redefinitions of art (repr. in Cox 390). Scheunemann also believes that “it is the abandonment of the age-old spatial conception of the Renaissance in cubist painting, . . . that marked the beginning and served as a constant reference point of the avant-garde’s epochal innovations” (16). The Cubist formulas clearly influenced many of those members of the Expressionist movement working in the wake of such innovations. Just as Edschmid wants to bring out the “actual nature” of a whore from her image – to reach beyond the surrogacy of the “decorations of her profession, . . . her hat, her gait, her lips” (97) – so Braque, in his painting the *Grand Nu* of ten years earlier, wishes to “expose the Absolute, and not the merely factitious woman” (“Statement” 53). Just as the critic Flake describes Expressionist literature as “longing for total emotion, by means of increased ‘spirituality’” (“Literatur” 186), so Braque, on his pioneering quest, is trying to “translate . . . emotion into art” (53). Braque is emphasising the distance between nature and art and feels the necessity to steer art away from its traditional mimetic duties. Rather than imitating nature, Braque promotes an art that translates the artist’s emotional – as opposed to sensory – experience of nature. In other words, an art that rejects “direct impressions in favour of shaping the power of the artist’s intelligence” (Green 123). Indeed, Christopher Green describes the underlying theme of Cubism as “the progressive assertion of art’s autonomy from the imitation of nature” (123).

(ii) Inspiration. Materialism versus Idealism

Whilst being incredibly influential, the gallery Cubists, in their turn, are said to have been inspired by Paul Cézanne, and Cézanne’s ideas are said to have provided, through Cubism, the catalyst for the whole of what we now term as “modern art” (Read 13). At the very start of the twentieth century Cézanne’s wish was to penetrate through the subjectivity of the Impressionists’ sensual appearance of things “to the [objective] reality that did not change, that was present beneath the bright but deceptive picture presented by the kaleidoscope of the senses” (Read 13). This is considered to be the beginning of “abstraction” as it is known today. In Christopher Gray’s interpretation, the Cubists “believed profoundly in the power of

the human spirit and the creativeness of the human mind,” in its ability to penetrate through to that deeper reality posited by Cézanne (7). Gray explains that this is in fact part of the whole “larger complex of idealist philosophy” that acted as the background to the Cubist movement (7).

The struggle between the opposing philosophies of Materialism and Idealism had been taking place for the whole duration of the preceding century, and the Cubists were to play their part in the furthering of the idealist cause that was much less developed in France than in Germany. The basic assumption of Materialism was “the belief in the absolute reality of the material universe governed by the law of causality.” On the other hand, the fundamental supposition of Idealism was the belief in the one absolute “reality of the human spirit” over, above, and apart from that of the “illusory world of materiality” (Gray 8). In the nineteenth century French Aestheticist artists and poets began to develop in line with German Idealist philosophy, in particular with that of Immanuel Kant. Kant considered art to be absolute, purposeless, and that “such conformity to nature as it may show was to be free and unbounded by rule” (Gray 10). Art lay within its own domain separated from the material world and all notions of truth or morality. In time Kant came to believe not only that art was an expression of the human spirit, but that it could penetrate behind the phenomenal world of sense and appearance to reveal the “thing in itself,” the ultimate reality.

The parallel development in French art led critic Maurice Raynal, in his *Anthologie de la peinture en France* (“Anthology of French Painting”), to divide both the history and contemporary situation of French art into two opposing tendencies: realism and idealism (trans. in Green 125). The term “realism” is used to describe the work of those artists concerned with the direct transmission of sensations from the material universe such as that of the Naturalists and Impressionists. Idealism is used to describe art that is lifted above nature by means of techniques derived from the artist’s imagination, such as advanced Cubism, which, as will be seen, involved a manipulation of abstract shapes. Raynal belonged to the side of the violently anti-academic critics who supported the notion of two conflicting art worlds: that of “*l’art vivant*”, or independent art, as distinct from that of the institutionalised art of the official state-patronised salons; of avant-garde

idealism or abstraction as distinct from traditional realism. So, it appears from Braque's early statement of 1908 that, although he is still translating his emotional, if not sensory, experience of nature onto canvas, he is already beginning to envisage the Idealist work of art, the total independence and abstraction of the artwork from nature, the autonomous work of art, that, for many, comes to characterise gallery Cubism.

(iii) Jean Metzinger and Salon Cubism

The first written article stemming from inside the Cubist movement appeared three years later in 1911 and was written by Jean Metzinger, a salon Cubist who was nevertheless closely acquainted with the gallery Cubists and was in the unique position of being able to speak for both groups. It was entitled "Note on Painting" and published in the art journal *Pan*. Metzinger, as a writer and one of the very first followers of Picasso and Braque from 1910 onwards, was instrumental in the spread of Cubist ideas. Metzinger explains that Picasso and Braque, along with their followers, were concerned with a "fundamental liberation" and not with any "half-measures!" However, Metzinger then takes care to temper the hereto-apparent intentions of the early Cubist movement, stating that these artists wanted to avoid "drag[ing] painting towards purely decorative speculation [the realms of 'emotion' and abstraction]" and intended to remain within the bounds of realism (59). As a salon Cubist, influenced by the spread of nationalist sentiment in the wake of the Moroccan Crisis of 1911, Metzinger took a more traditional stance to that of the gallery Cubists, and tended away from extreme aestheticism which proposed the isolation of art in its own aesthetic field and the segregation of the cultural field from the social. Artistic elitism and experimentation came to be seen as a threat to the French cultural and social order, and as David Cottington writes in his *Cubism in the Shadow of War*, "for the [salon] Cubists, given the tacit acknowledgement of the authority of public opinion that their salon participation entailed, . . . an appeal to nationalism in some form or another was pre-ordained" (156). Whilst Metzinger had a strong sense of artistic elitism, "a belief in the cultural and moral superiority of artistic creativity, . . . as nationalism extended its hegemony . . . it was traditionalism that began to predominate" (Cottington 155). The salon Cubists had suffered great

humiliation and criticism in the wake of their first exhibition in 1911 – “Room 41” – and now sought to defend and legitimise a movement that was straining under accusations of political subversion, avant-garde elitism, and of “provoking the public” (Cottington 154).

Once again displaying the pragmatism of the salon Cubists, Metzinger subsequently wrote the article “Cubism and Tradition,” published in the *Paris-Journal* in 1911, in which he stresses that the Cubists were in fact “slaves to no [elitist] formula,” and simply had a “common determination” to stay true to the fundamental laws of art and to reveal painting in its “naked and pure” state (66). Metzinger writes that the Cubists simply “uprooted the prejudice that commanded the painter to remain motionless in front of the object, at a fixed distance from it, and to catch on the canvas no more than a retinal photograph more or less modified by “personal feeling” (66). As Metzinger states in his “Note on Painting,” Picasso is fortified by the thought that “it is useless to paint where it is possible to describe” (59); thus, he now writes, “as soon as line threatens to take on a descriptive or decorative importance they [the Cubists] break it” (“Cubism” 67). The Cubists clearly wanted to divorce themselves from the functions of photography; they did not want to be comparable to an “art” that had already perfected the depiction of “reality.” Hence, the Cubists “allowed themselves to move round the object, in order to give, under the control of intelligence, a concrete representation of it, made up of several successive aspects. Formerly a picture took possession of space, now it reigns also in time” (67). This appears to be a critical belief of the Cubists – the idea that painting should contain the portrayal of movement (something which the field of mechanical reproduction had not yet perfected as an “art form”). This was Cubism in its initial “analytic” phase; it made use of geometrical methods to dissect and fragment temporal reality, to translate time into space.

(iv) “Du Cubisme”

A year later in 1912, Metzinger, along with fellow salon recruit Albert Gleizes, went on to write the first and only theoretical and foundational account of the Cubist movement. “Du Cubisme” (“On Cubism”), first published in book form, is described as being “part manifesto, part treatise, part exhortation” (Columbia 3).

In “On Cubism,” the attempt can be seen to accommodate the wishes of both the salon and the gallery Cubists, to “describe the common ground that was shared among [all] artists and to reconcile their differences under a unifying theory” (Columbia 3). The work grew out of the context of the Puteaux gatherings where “for the first time, salon and gallery Cubism, and their associated aesthetics, shared a milieu” (Cottington, *Shadow* 158). Thus, in this text the attempt to legitimise Cubism by associating it with the work of respectable artists can be found alongside the attempt to justify the challenge Cubism presented to the public by asserting the necessarily avant-gardist status of art and the artist. The primary concern, however, was to address the need of the larger salon group to legitimise itself and its art in the eyes of the state and the bourgeoisie in order to ensure the continuation of its state patronage. Indeed, although not focussing on Cubism specifically, Luca Somigli’s study, *Legitimizing the Artist*, demonstrates the legitimising function of the art manifesto. The function of this document was to defend and justify Cubism, and to establish its place in art history by directing interpretations of it. The document only secondarily served as an assertion of the necessity of Cubism by means of an attack on rival isms, which, according to Puchner, would distinguish the text from the defensive polemic of the romantic era and earn it the classification of “art manifesto,” whilst propelling it into the praxis of life (*Poetry* 70). The rhetoric of the document remained very much one of calm and reasoned defence. The Cubists were not prepared to reject the past at the expense of their own social acceptance.

“On Cubism” opens by creating a narrative of aesthetic progression, mapping a line through Courbet, Manet, and Cézanne, to the art of Cubism. The idea is that “to understand Cézanne is to foresee Cubism,” and thus the Cubists are “justified in saying that between this school and previous manifestations there is only a difference of intensity” (105). “Intensity” here refers to the degree of realism employed by the successive artists, starting with the “superficial reality” of Courbet and gradually developing into the “profound reality” of Cézanne. Metzinger and Gleizes confront the accusation that the tendency to increase the intensity of realism is to “distort the curve of tradition,” arguing that “unless we are to condemn all modern painting, we must regard Cubism as legitimate, for it continues modern methods” (105). “On Cubism” states that we should see in Cubism “the only conception of pictorial art

now possible" (105). In an appeal to the traditional mindset, Metzinger and Gleizes are playing with the commonly held concept of realism, equating a move towards abstraction not with a move away from realism, as might be expected, but with a more true and intense realism. Christopher Gray states that "by common agreement the most basic characteristic of the earliest phase of Cubism was a return to realism" (44-45). Both Apollinaire and André Salmon recognised Courbet as the father of the new painters, whilst Metzinger and Gleizes wrote that Courbet "inaugurated a realistic impulse which runs through all modern efforts" (*Cubism*, 11-12). However, Gray goes on to state that "one cannot take their [Metzinger and Gleizes'] definition of realism at face value" since they differentiate between "conventional reality" and "true reality," between the "superficial realism" of Courbet and "profound realism" of Cézanne (75). The realism of Cézanne which inspired the Cubists was a "very different type of realism from that which the Impressionists developed from the ideas of Courbet" (Gray 45). In Gray's words, one might say of Cézanne that "what he sought beyond Impressionism was something that belongs to the realm of the mind, and not to the realm of phenomena. He sought a permanent and absolute truth in nature which could only be approached by the intuition and intellect, a transcendent Ideal which linked him with the philosophies of Kant" (50). Cubism was a completely new *Weltanschauung* or, in artist Juan Gris' words, "simply a new way of representing the world," which gave a whole new meaning to the term realism (qtd. in Kahnweiler 145). It would appear that the Cubists resorted to sophistry in their determination to validate their art and gain acceptance as artists.

Indeed, whilst stressing that they would wish for no more to lie between Cubism and Impressionism than a difference of intensity, Metzinger and Gleizes nevertheless take on a Nietzschean tone in their closing lines as they lay claim to their elite avant-garde status as Cubists:

That the ultimate end of painting is to reach the masses, we have agreed; it is, however, not in the language of the masses that painting should address the masses, but in its own, in order to move, to dominate, to direct, and not in order to be understood. . . . [As a realist, the artist] will fashion the real in the image of his mind, for there is only one truth, ours, when we impose it on everyone (201).

Thus, if the function of this "manifesto" is, in part, to intervene in reality or "real" life, leading the way for the art it champions, the reality it will form a part of will be,

from the start, an aestheticised one. If painting is to “reach the masses” it is to do so with no threat to its own autonomous status. Furthermore, the uniquely autonomous and radical qualities of Cubist painting are stressed earlier in the piece as Metzinger and Gleizes argue against the “decorative considerations” which their critics believe should “govern the spirit of the new painters.” Such considerations, they believe, lead to a work which is the very “antithesis of the picture” (106). A decorative work is “essentially dependent” on its relationship with that which surrounds it, and “necessarily incomplete” without its *raison d’être*, in the form of society or nature. The Cubist picture, on the other hand, “bears its *raison d’être* within itself.” It is “essentially independent” and “necessarily complete.” It has no function of harmonising with society or nature, or of gratifying the mind. As an “organism” rather than an “organ,” it simply “harmonises . . . with the universe,” and with itself (106). Although the Cubists admit that “the reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished . . . at the first step,” the call is to “let the picture imitate nothing; let it nakedly present its *raison d’être*” (106). Analytic Cubism, which remained based on an analysis of nature, was just a step on the way to the more advanced Cubism which developed from 1912 onwards. This is an indisputable statement of the doctrine of the painting as “autonomous object,” and a reaction against the painting as a “decorative object” that is assimilated into life.

As Cottington vitally sums it up, if “On Cubism” can be described as “an attempt at “a kind of legislation of the Cubist movement, in order to raise it to the rank of an honourable means of expression, to integrate it into the Eternal and Universal Unity of art,” it also represented a decisive shift in the balance of forces within the Cubist movement, and a crucial stage in the ascendancy of gallery over salon Cubism” (Shadow 160). Here is a chief salon Cubist – the text is far more the work of Metzinger than of Gleizes – half-heartedly arguing for the traditional roots of Cubism whilst notably omitting any appeal to the nationalism of the salon-sustaining bourgeois public. Despite Metzinger’s alliance to the salon Cubists, it seems this text reveals his true concerns. Metzinger argued ultimately for an aestheticism that differed, even more than that of the gallery Cubists, from the “engagement with the dynamic experience of modern life that characterised the work of the other salon Cubists” (Cottington, Shadow 161). The final goal of art, for

Metzinger, was “pure effusion,” and not a reintegration into life. In time, painting will imitate neither “flowers,” nor “landscape,” nor “faces” (106).

(v) Maurice Raynal and the advent of war

In 1912, the young critic, Maurice Raynal, who, though not an artist himself, gains credibility through his acquaintance with Metzinger and the Cubists in Montmartre by 1910, confirms that the function of art must not be the “servile imitation of nature” because photography has now brought that “art” to perfection. Raynal states in the preface to a catalogue that the artist must rather “translate” and “interpret” nature by means of his “intellectual powers.” In attempting to reach the truth, the artist of today must “conceive” as well as “see” the object he represents (“Preface” 91). Raynal is arguing in support of the new Cubist art, following the line of argument that afforded it a philosophical justification. The argument first established by critic Oliver Hourcade claimed that Kant’s classical distinction between “essence” and “appearance” – in Raynal’s terms “conception” and “vision” – underlay Cubism’s departure from the conventional representation of objects. Cubism, seen thus, marked a return to recognised philosophical traditions and rebutted critics’ accusations of revolutionary anarchism in an appeal to the traditionally nationalist sentiment of the bourgeoisie which had increased in the wake of the Moroccan Crisis.

In a second piece of 1912, “Conception and Vision,” Raynal asserts that the Cubist principles are close to some form of Berkeleian Idealism in that they consider perception as secondary to conception. Raynal goes on to explain that perception is inadequate for an augmentation of knowledge because we can never see all the dimensions of an object at once. Conception, however, “makes us aware of the object in all its forms,” and thus, it is this that should be depicted by the artist and not merely the form immediately presented to the senses (95). How far this method presented a traditionalist aesthetic is, however, debatable. Critic Jacques Rivière, also writing in late 1911, believed that the Cubists had taken their representation of the essence of an object “to the point of absurdity” (qtd. in Cottington, *Shadow* 152). In support of this objection, much inconsistency can be found in the writings of both Hourcade and Raynal. Hourcade combined his legitimisation of Cubism with an

aestheticist avant-gardism just as Raynal added a coda to his second article quoting Kant on the purposelessness of artistic beauty. This was a declaration in support of aestheticism and the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* that directly contradicted Raynal's use of Kant to emphasise Cubist traditionalism.

Raynal ultimately bemoans the relatively recent substitution of the principle of conception with that of vision, stating that it has "replaced the idea of art for art's sake, which the principle of conception involved" ("Conception" 96). Here we have a clear signal that Raynal is in favour of an art without function, a "disinterested" art, and can infer from this that he feels the Cubists' true intention was to enforce the autonomy of art. Raynal's inconsistencies betray the fact that supporters of Cubism were often appealing to classicist values – characterised by an adherence to traditional aesthetic form – merely in order to save Cubism from accusations of subversion and unpatriotic behaviour. In appealing to widespread traditionalist values salon Cubism could ensure its survival in a climate that increasingly saw experimental art as a threat to the French cultural and social order. However, what seems to shine through in Raynal's text is a leaning towards the aestheticist avant-gardism of the gallery Cubists, Picasso and Braque.

This leaning towards gallery Cubism became accentuated when, with the outbreak of war in August 1914, many of the salon Cubists were mobilised, leaving the further development of Cubism largely to those who remained or returned as a result of injury to the home front – namely Picasso and Braque respectively. As Cottington puts it, the field was left to "those whose lack of interest in an art that engaged directly with the experiences and emblems of modernity . . . was compounded by disinclination to confront either the horrors of the battle fields or the mundanities of civilian city life" (*Histories* 166). Christopher Green tells us that by the 1920s Raynal had fully sided with the anti-academic critics who promoted *l'art vivant* or independent art over the art of the official salons (126).

It would appear that the advent of war served to confirm the ascendancy of gallery Cubism, whereas in the pre-1914 period several contradictory aspirations fought for ascendancy. Green observes that "between 1912 and August 1914 Cubism was a movement with many futures . . . [which was] characterised by a diversity that could stimulate a wide range of positive responses, often contradictory"

(13). However, after 1914 Cubism was identified exclusively with the isolation of art in a self-governing category which was considered superior to life. Prior to 1914, the will to aesthetic separatism is certainly evident, yet equally present is the desire to “tie art and life back together again as completely as possible by treating art as a way of living continuous with any other aspect of living, not merely as a mode of self expression – an aspiration often combined with emergent social and political stances” (Green 4). Post-1914, not only did salon Cubism, with its need for social integration, remove itself from the French art scene, but with that, the gallery Cubists further increased the distance of their art not only from imitation of the external world, but from any identifiable relation to the praxis of life. Along with the gallery Cubists’ need to evade the horrors of war – due to the increased nationalist sentiment such horrors engendered – went the need to purify their art. Both these factors, as Green points out, led to an “accentuation of the division between art and life,” and by the end of the war “that division had become the key to Cubist orthodoxy” (14).

In his article of 1912 on the *Section d’Or* exhibition of Cubist art, published in the review *La Section d’Or*, Raynal confirms that the Cubist “conception of a *pure* painting, . . . shall . . . be neither descriptive, nor anecdotal, nor psychological, nor moral, nor sentimental, nor educational, nor (lastly) decorative” (99). Raynal goes on to explain how the elimination of ulterior purposes led Juan Gris to “stick several real objects onto the canvas” which ensured there was no falling back into “imitation” and illusion. Indeed, by 1912, Picasso and Braque had steered Cubism into its “synthetic” phase and had begun to practice the technique of collage in an apparent attempt to move away from interpretive acts completely and to build their own flat, autonomous realities. As Robert Rosenblum writes, “the technique of pasting so strongly emphasizes the two-dimensional reality of the picture surface that even the few vestiges of traditional illusionism clinging to earlier Cubist painting . . . could not survive for long” (70). Kant’s epistemological distinction between “analytic” and “synthetic” judgements is adopted by critics to distinguish between the early and later phases of Cubism. It provided a convenient paradigm with which to explain the development of the Cubist aesthetic. For Kant, an analytic judgement merely breaks up the subject “into constituent concepts that have all along been thought in it” (48). A synthetic judgement, on the other hand, adds to its subject “a

predicate which had not in anywise been thought in it" (48). Likewise, in analytic Cubism, the subject of the painting is broken up and the fragments juxtaposed though no new element is added. Synthetic Cubism, however, takes "analysis" as its starting point and reconstitutes the fragmented subject into something new not to be found in nature.

By 1919, Raynal was able to view Cubism in a more detached manner made possible in the wake of the First World War. At this time, he wrote "Some Intentions of Cubism," published five years later in the *Bulletin de l'effort moderne*, in a final attempt to justify the principles of Cubism in the face of its critics. Raynal explains that the uncomfortable and publicly inaccessible pictorial notation of Cubism can be justified by a quest for truth that must be "a finality apart from any end" (151). In other words, if we are to arrive at the truth through art, Cubism cannot make any claims to be an art "for" anyone or anything other than its own sake. Art must be independent from all that surrounds it, including "the subject that has inspired it." Art must surround rather than be surrounded. Raynal continues that the Cubist work of art will be "an object, a piece of furniture if you like; better still, it will be a kind of formula; to put it more strongly, a *word*. In fact it will be, to the objects it represents, what a word is to the objects it signifies. . . . In this way we shall possess the very idea of the objects, in their purest externalisation; we shall have a new representation of them" (153). Raynal then, as usual, offers his disclaimer, stating that "Cubism is simply an attempt at a new notation susceptible of improvement. . . . It has no other aim than to submit, for examination by your sensibility, new wholes made up of elements from perfectly familiar objects" (153). The Cubist approach, Raynal stresses once more, is to achieve such an aim by capturing in painting or in sculpture, not just an instance, but the whole of duration, "not just a dimension but space itself," by a translation of what is presented to the understanding as opposed to the senses. Raynal is still striving to legitimise Cubism but by this stage his focus is on gallery Cubism and the autonomous work of art. Clearly, Maurice Raynal's accounts of Cubism can in no way be used to support any idea that the movement actually intended to do anything other than reassert the distinction between art and nature and thereby reaffirm the autonomy of the institution of art.

(vi) Apollinaire and Synthetic Cubism

Going back to 1912, Cubist poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire wrote an account of “The Beginnings of Cubism” for the *Paris Times*. Apollinaire confirms Raynal’s definition of Cubist practice, describing it as “the art of painting new wholes with elements taken, not from the reality of vision, but from the reality of conception” (103). Apollinaire illustrates that no matter how a chair is viewed it never ceases to have “four legs, a seat and a back” (103). The aim of Cubism was to render this “inner” or “essential” reality as opposed to merely the “seen” reality. That is, to render all three dimensions, but in their full glory, and not as they would be rendered by an artist practising “*trompe-l’oeil* illusionism, through foreshortening or perspective” (103). In other words, Cubism’s fundamental assertion in its initial analytic stage was that “a work of art is related to but different from nature” and that it should achieve a “balance between dependence upon nature and autonomy of art,” a “vital equilibrium between the reality of nature and the reality of art” (Rosenblum 66, 67, 71).

Apollinaire concludes his piece by saying that the Cubists’ aim to arrive at the truth via “pure painting” led artists such as Picabia and Marcel Duchamp to go as far as to break with the new conceptualist formula and turn to an art “completely free of rules,” rules which could perhaps be seen to undermine the purity of art by holding it to an interpretation of external reality (103-104). It would seem that conceptual art might indeed lead to an autonomy of art, free from the visual tradition and the restraining rules of society, but that even self-rule proves too restricting for the work of some artists. Yet, what is art devoid of even its own government? It is “the decadence of the arts” (Raynal, *Modern* 51), an anarchy of art, which surely leads to annihilation of the elite category of art as distinct from all others. It is the self-destruction of “art” as our society knows it. It is anti-art, the sublation of art. Is this what Burkhardt Lindner meant by his theory that “already germinally present in the doctrine of autonomy” is the “demand by art for sublation”? (paraphrased in Bürger 99). In his thesis, “Sublation of Art into the praxis of Life? Concerning the topicality of the controversy over the historical avant-garde movements,” Lindner then demonstrates this continuity by concluding that the transfer of this demand for sublation “to the categorical level of art as an institution [would necessarily lead to] a

confirmation of the traditional autonomy of art” (Lindner 92; trans. in Bürger 99). As Bürger writes of Duchamp’s “rule-free” work, as soon as it has been “accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum” it no longer provokes and attacks, but affirms and adapts to the institution of art (52). Lindner’s thesis brings into question, as is its intention, Bürger’s determination of the avant-garde, since if the demand for sublation is continuous with the ideology of autonomy, this implies that the avant-garde movements never truly intended to relinquish their autonomous status. Indeed, the idea is that their demand for sublation was merely a passing phase of their larger doctrine of autonomy, and that as soon as this protest reached the institution of art it would be accepted and labelled as “art”; hence, the autonomy of art would be reaffirmed, even more strongly.

In 1912, Duchamp was approaching the production of a “plastic reality” with his painting *Nude Descending the Stairs* in which he tried to break from the chains of still-life and naturalism. From this time Duchamp’s increasing tendency towards constructions in wood, glass and metal caused Apollinaire to remark that Duchamp was destined to “reconcile art and the people” through his abolition of the aesthetic commodity and the development of the objective “free creation” (qtd. in Read 114). It would seem that Metzinger’s identification of “pure effusion” as the goal of art can in fact come full circle to be equated with complete dissolution and eventual sublation of the autonomous institution of art. Yet, even if Duchamp aspired to disrupt the institution of art, most Cubists wanted to uphold it as the domain of the elite, seeing any such attempts as “hazardous” to the status of art and artists (Apollinaire “Beginnings” 104). Indeed, in 1915, Duchamp, along with Picabia and Man Ray, went on to form the nucleus of a new “rule-free” movement: New York’s Dada movement which will be examined in Chapter Five.

The following year, in 1913, Apollinaire wrote an essay entitled “Modern Painting” which was originally given as a lecture in a Berlin gallery and published in the German journal *Der Sturm*. In addition to those issues already discussed, he touches for the first time on the new freedom that Picasso and Braque found in 1912 with the technique of collage and the transition from so-called “analytic” to “synthetic” Cubism. Apollinaire describes this new practice as obeying a “plastic inspiration” (113), that is, as creating “an object with its own plastic identity and not

as 'a painting of' another thing" (Read 114). Now the work of art was valued for its own sake and not for its correspondence with reality. Indeed, according to Timothy Mathews, what Apollinaire perceives as being distinctive in the work of Braque is "the extent to which it discovers experience and creativity in the independence of the work of art itself, in competition with the natural world." Apollinaire writes that, for Cubists, "the painting will exist ineluctably," irrespective of the natural world (*Oeuvres* IV. 17; qtd. in Mathews 102). Collage, according to Rosenblum, "simulated an even greater consciousness of the independent reality of pictorial means than had ever been achieved in earlier Cubism"; the paintings of 1910-11 "had never reached the autonomy of separate pictorial means so explicitly defined in collage" (70).

These "plastic realities," however, though never intended to go full circle in a "reconciliation of art and the people" à la Duchamp, were, in Rosenblum's interpretation, actually intended as an antidote rather than an extension of the growing illegibility of so many recent Cubist works. Picasso and Braque "apparently began to feel a strong urge toward clarifying their . . . increasingly illegible constructs of reality," and thus, "resolved the crisis of 1911 by revitalising their contact with the external world" (Rosenblum 67). The argument is that their references to the external world had become "dangerously obscured," and without some form of contact with the external world Cubism's intended balance between dependence upon nature and autonomy of art, in the form of conceptual realism, was threatened. Art freed of the moorings of visual representation was drifting too far towards the realm of pure abstraction. The stimuli of the external world were by 1911 largely unrecognisable; art was losing contact with its very reason for being. This was not quite what Picasso and Braque had in mind for their work or themselves. Synthetic Cubism came as a lifeline to pull Cubism back from obscurity. The idea was to throw obvious visual stimuli from the external world into the abstract works of analytic Cubism, thus reasserting the works' contact with reality. Such easily recognised stimuli acted as reminders or pointers that the rest of the work was also inspired by the external world. They also encouraged overlap between concepts of art and life, illusion and reality. In the view of those such as Rosenblum, Picasso and Braque literally inserted the world into their art in an

anxious attempt to place their art back into the social sphere, to engage with popular culture. The “world” they inserted, of course, was a very narrow version which was interpreted in terms of urban modernity and city life. This was life and society for the artists concerned, but did not account for the different “life” experience of the rural population. Alexandr Shevchenko’s account of urban life in Russia, written in 1913, could just as well be applied to Paris at the time:

The Earth and Nature no longer exist in their conventional sense. They have been turned into building foundations, into asphalt for pavements and roads. Life presents itself to us as quite different, replete with different forms new to us. . . . We can no longer be satisfied with a simple organic copy of nature. . . . Naturalistic painting does not exist for us either, just as nature does not exist without roadways, . . . plumbing and electric light (44).

Rosenblum asserts that, if synthetic Cubism and collage, “with its material references to non-artistic realities, acted as an antidote to the growing illegibility of so many Cubist works of 1911, it [also] enriched considerably the paradoxes involved in the Cubist dialectic between art and reality” (69). Synthetic Cubism, instead of “reducing real objects to their abstract components,” appears to “invent objects from such very real components as pasted paper, flat patches of colour, and clearly outlined planar fragments. The process now seems to be one of construction rather than analysis.” This creative process can lead to the “presumption,” as Rosenblum terms it, on facing a lack of statements of intent, that synthetic Cubism aims for complete independence from nature in its creation of plastic realities. And perhaps it is right to presume such an aim, despite the Cubist’s apparent “good” intentions to make their work more accessible to society. After all, is it mere coincidence that Picasso and Braque’s sudden desire to be legible in 1911 coincided with spreading nationalist sentiment and growing hostility towards experimental art in the wake of the Moroccan Crisis of the same year? Perhaps, just as the salon Cubists strove to legitimise Cubism at this time, so the gallery Cubists sought to make their art less exclusive. In other words, the suggestion is that if Picasso and Braque did intend to re-engage with the external world, the change of tack was circumstantial and somewhat forced; it was not a genuine aim but more a pragmatic detour on the road to total autonomy. This very much reflects Lindner’s thesis examined earlier that the avant-gardist demand for sublation is continuous with the

doctrine of autonomy.

Even if the introduction of collage is interpreted as “a breakdown of the habitual distinctions between the ephemera of daily living and the sanctity of the work of art made for exhibition and preservation,” by the end of the war in 1918, such a blurring of distinctions was almost never to be found again. As Gray writes, “as long as the idea remains that an appeal to nature is the ultimate validity of the artist’s idea, Cubism has not passed into its purely synthetic phase” (91). Gray even goes as far as to say that “the crucial point in the change to Synthetic Cubism came at the time when the artist broke away from the dynamic and prophetic role of the artist in society as typified by Apollinaire, Gleizes and Metzinger. The picture gradually ceased to be a revelation of a new and higher reality, and became an existent aesthetic object in itself. The stress gradually passed from the communication of reality to the creation of new real objects” (125). This really was art solely for its own sake, and not for the sake of revealing “some new insight into reality” (124). Nevertheless, “despite this ‘art for art’s sake’ approach typical of the thinking of the Synthetic Cubist,” as Gray puts it (153), Picasso still retained some of the ideas of Apollinaire, implying that, although art is autonomous, the artist’s function is to communicate his perceptive insight into nature to the rest of humanity. Likewise, although Braque felt that true art must transcend rules he also felt the “necessity for rules” if art was to progress and avoid sterility (Gray 140). The time was not right for a complete relinquishing of nature and the Cubists were not about to make the same mistake as the Symbolists before them, floundering in “solipsistic isolation” (Gray 20).

Indeed, Cubist manifestos appear to be consistently contradictory and, as Gray says, “we find Picasso making statements about art that indicate that he does not adhere wholeheartedly to any particular point of view” (156). In his “Statement to Maurius de Zayas,” soon to be discussed, one feels Picasso is instigating a dialogue by insisting on a certain level of contact between art and external reality – even if only in the form of a one-way transmission of the artist’s insight into nature to society at large – yet almost in the same breath he will retract that view in professing the inability of art to tell the truth about nature, since nature and art are not on a par with each other (165-166).

Theda Shapiro, in her study *Painters and Politics*, explains this common incongruity in avant-gardist intention by stating that whilst most artists “were sincere in their theoretical humanitarianism” and “desire for social harmony,” they were unwilling “to become directly or professionally involved in bringing about social change” and to “integrate themselves into the rank and file” (222). Shapiro goes on to say that artists who remained politically committed to “reintroduce the esthetic into daily life . . . [in a] profoundly revolutionary act” would be obliged to sacrifice both their art and personal status to the achievement of social justice, but that “however strong their commitment to the cause of social justice, most avant-gardists refused to make that sacrifice” (223-224). Shapiro writes:

[Avant-gardists were] tied, in the end, more to their status as an avant-garde than to any desire to end bourgeois supremacy, they refused to put themselves in the hands of the workingman, to trust in that good sense and innate artistic feeling with which they had long credited him (224).

Shapiro’s claim that “almost all painters had impulses in both directions” (Shapiro 221) is perhaps illustrated by Apollinaire’s conviction that Duchamp, despite his promotion of an autonomous art, was destined to “reconcile art and the people.”

In 1913, Apollinaire also wrote “The Cubist Painters,” a compilation of many previously published articles on painters he considered to belong to the avant-garde. In speaking in general of this modern art, he writes, “verisimilitude no longer has any importance, since everything is sacrificed by the artist to truth, the necessities of a higher nature, whose existence he assumes but does not lay bare. The subject has little or no importance any more” (115). Since artists today “are above all men who want to become inhuman,” it is left to “photographers [to] manufacture duplicates of nature” (qtd. in Kolocotroni 264). Young artists are living in “anticipation of a sublime art” (264). In offering us works which are “more cerebral than sensual,” the “peculiar end” and “social role” of art becomes one of renewing “continually the appearance nature has for the eyes of men,” of creating the “illusion of the typical,” the emblematic as opposed to the imitative (264). However, Apollinaire recognises that nature and society have not yet been completely abandoned in the search for truth. The work of many new artists is not as abstract as it could be, the new “plastic” art still being very young and experimental and perhaps wary of Symbolist impotence. This seems to be very much in line with what was said of Expressionist

art in the previous chapter; that is, it will take time to progress to the ultimate goal: a wholly spiritual or abstract art. Apollinaire's take on photography weakens Scheunemann's theory that avant-gardism was a reaction to advances in technology. For Apollinaire, it seems, the Cubists had a "sublime" ideology which departed from the principle of mimesis independently of the advent of photography.

Apollinaire goes on to write that the new painters are no longer limited to the three Euclidian dimensions, and are occupying themselves with the "Fourth Dimension," that is to say, with time, which is witnessed as movement. As Apollinaire writes, "the Fourth Dimension endows objects with plasticity" (116). It gave artworks a life of their own independent from the rest of society. According to Apollinaire, the modern school of painting wants to create a "beauty disengaged from whatever charm man has for man," an art disengaged from social obligation (117), a "synthetic" art.

(vii) Fernand Léger

In the same year, 1913, artist Fernand Léger wrote an essay on "The Origins of Painting and its Representational Value" for *Montjoie!*, a leading avant-garde periodical of the pre-war years. Léger feels that people who think Cubism is just a passing phase on the return to "painting for everyone," are greatly mistaken, for "when an art like this is in possession of all its means," it will be able to "realise works that are absolutely complete," that is, it will no longer produce illusionistic works, but self-sufficient works that contain a tangible reality within themselves. An art that is about creating new independent wholes is bound, Léger states, "to impose itself for a very long time," since it does not depend on society for its existence by carrying out a "social task" such as instruction, education or entertainment (124-125). In other words, "an art like this" is, in fact, to Léger's mind, an autonomous art. Léger pushed Cubism in a direction that Braque and Picasso had refused to go in 1912: towards pure abstraction. By 1913 Léger was producing geometrical paintings such as *Contrast of Forms* which, in title as well as in form, were totally devoid of all references to human life in the external world. So what was it that prevented Léger's art from slipping into the sterility of isolation from external reality that it seems Picasso and Braque so feared and from which Gray feels Symbolism

suffered?

Léger's essay does more than just confirm an incongruity between Cubist intentions and Bürger's theory of the avant-garde; it also serves to support Scheunemann's theory that Cubism was a direct reaction to modern mechanical achievements. Léger is keen to stress – unlike the other Cubists examined who remain reticent on the subject or adhere to purely ideological explanations – that technological advancements such as colour photography and the cinematograph have “made completely superfluous the development of the visual, sentimental, representational and popular subject in painting.” Thus, “the means of expression having multiplied,” the new plastic art logically restricted itself to a “realism of conception” as opposed to of vision (125-126). Pictorial art must submit, along with all other “manifestations of the human mind,” to the process of specialisation which is now “characteristic of modern life” (126). Perhaps Léger's work was saved from complete illegibility and an impotent state of autarky because his abstract forms reflected the development of modern industry from human to machine-based production. The metallic quality of works such as *Discs* is redolent of an autonomous abstract art that has nevertheless retained some element of conceptual realism, some external stimulus, which ensured against the redundancy of its social status and that of its creator.

(viii) *L'art cérébriste*

The director of the periodical *Montjoie!*, the self-proclaimed organ of French artistic imperialism, was Ricciotto Canudo. In the January-February 1914 number Canudo issued the “Manifeste de l'art cérébriste.” Canudo writes of France's domination of the modern artistic revolution and states: “This domination, it has been said, is absolutely cerebral,” and has been so increasingly for “about thirty years and more” when it started aiming “to make the brain shiver more than the heart” (9). Canudo describes how the Aesthetic and Decadent movements in the form of the followers of Oscar Wilde and Gabriele d'Annunzio “pushed poetry towards cerebralist ways – inseparably intellectual and sensual,” how modern music “is dominated by totally cerebral lyrical preoccupations . . . where sensuality is cerebralised and the cerebral becomes very sensual,” and how the plastic arts have

followed the same evolution, deforming the form in a move away from the sentimental, and thereby “opening the doors of gold” for the likes of Cézanne and the Cubists (9). In sum, Canudo states that “the general character of contemporary innovation can be found in the transposition of artistic emotion of the *sentimental plane* onto the *cerebral plane*” (9). The Cerebralists, “whilst being against all sentimentalism in art and in life, . . . would like a more noble and pure art, that does not touch the heart, but stimulates the brain, *which does not charm, but which makes one think*” (9). This supports Maurice Raynal’s belief that the Cubist must use his “intellectual powers” when interpreting nature and must “conceive” rather than merely see the object he represents (“Preface” 91). As has been determined, such an approach to art often went hand in hand with an aestheticist avant-gardism; Raynal believed in a purposeless art and supported the doctrine of *l’art pour l’art* which he maintained “the principle of conception involved” (Cottington, Shadow 96).

(ix) Picasso and Braque after 1914

After 1914 and the mobilisation of many of the salon Cubists, Picasso and Braque were slightly less reticent with regard to their aesthetic intent. Georges Braque, in 1917, recorded some of his “Thoughts on Painting” in the form of concise aphorisms. Many of these, which will not be repeated here, simply serve to confirm the writings of Raynal and Apollinaire of preceding years, number nine stating “one must not imitate what one wishes to create” (147). What is of interest, however, is that this particular aphorism is expanded upon by Picasso in 1923 when he writes in his “Statement to Marius de Zayas”: “We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise the truth” (165). In other words, to pretend that art is truth, or on a par with nature, by employing illusionistic methods, is futile, since “nature and art being two different things, cannot be the same thing.” Thus, through art we rather “express our conception of what nature is not,” however much we may try to do otherwise (166). Even to those artists who “believed in painting nature as it is, art has always been art and not nature” (166). Yet, although art can make no valid claims to be the truth, it can serve to tell the truth about conception. Thus the Cubists practice a realism of conception, set in opposition to, but purporting to be a “variation” or “continuation” of, naturalism, or a realism of vision (Picasso 167;

Metzinger and Gleizes 105). Picasso stresses the absurdity of the very concept of a “natural work of art,” such a label being a complete contradiction in terms to the Cubist mind (166).

(x) Conclusion

I can conclude at this point that, on the whole, the Cubist manifestos and statements selected for examination cannot serve to bolster Bürger’s theory that the avant-garde had any intention to destroy the autonomous status of art. For the Cubists, it seems, art is inherently distinct from nature and external reality in all its forms. In this vein, if anything is preventing a reintegration of art into the praxis of life, it is the pre-disposition of art itself. Furthermore, the reception of the Cubist manifestos was limited to the readership of various art journals and to those who read the exhibition catalogues when visiting art galleries. That the Cubists focused their attention on such an exclusive audience surely further supports the theory that these artists only sought acceptance by the institution and sanction for their work, and never had any intention to sublate their art into the praxis of life.

It is possible to understand how Cubism could be interpreted to fit in with Bürger’s theory, since the developments in artistic technique after 1912 are somewhat ambiguous in their motivation. As has been seen, Green believes that prior to 1914 the desire to “tie art and life back together again” was just as strong as the will to aesthetic separatism (4), and Rosenblum seems convinced that Picasso and Braque “resolved the crisis of 1911 by revitalising their contact with the external world” (67). Moreover, of course, the salon Cubists ostensibly strove for an “engagement with the dynamic experience of modern life” in an attempt to gain acceptance for their work in the wake of the Moroccan Crisis (Cottingham, Shadow 161). Whilst for Metzinger this may have been a merely pragmatic strategy, for others like Gleizes this may not have been the case.

Indeed, viewed from this angle, for certain Cubists the movement was in fact deeply involved in political life. As Mark Antliff writes in his article “Cubism, Celtism and the Body Politic,” Albert Gleizes attempts to “redefine Cubism politically,” and “presents himself as the ideological voice for Cubism in the public sphere” (656). In 1913 Gleizes published the essay “Le Cubisme et la tradition,”

which adopts the “anti-royalist anarcho-syndicalist racial ideology of a nationalist organisation known as the Celtic League” (Antliff 656). Gleizes thereby politicises the message of “Du Cubisme,” which he co-authored with Metzinger in 1912, which makes no attempt to appeal to any of the nationalist sentiments or traditionalist beliefs which were in the air at the time. Other salon Cubists who went to the front along with Gleizes in 1914 used their art, when they found the opportunity, to comment on the war and the plight of the masses amongst which nationalist sentiments were rife. In certain circles there certainly was the attempt to refresh the relationship between art and the praxis of life. However, between 1914 and 1918, it was what happened on the home front that gave Cubism a future after the armistice and, as a result, the balance was tipped in favour of the gallery Cubists. By the end of the Great War the intention of the Cubist movement with regard to the status of art was clear and unanimous. In the distilled Cubism of 1918-19 there was no longer a blurring of distinctions between the “ephemera of daily living and the sanctity of the work of art” in the manner of the salon Cubists, or as may have been suggested by the pre-war technique of collage (Green 14).

Unlike Gleizes, Metzinger, always a salon Cubist at heart, was not of the opinion that culture should become involved in nationalism, politics or social comment, more broadly speaking, that art should become bound up with the praxis of life. Indeed, as Theda Shapiro writes in her study, which could be used to support Scheunemann’s argument, “during the last seven or eight years before World War I, many painters ceased to manifest their social sympathies. Ostensibly they were now exclusively concerned with elaborating those styles with which they are today identified, and they almost unanimously deny that they paid much attention to contemporary world events or political questions” (84). However, Shapiro also notes that “while the social content of a non-representational work may not be obvious, that is no reason to assume it does not exist” (85). Metzinger’s reluctance to make manifest any social comment, alongside a destruction of “the accepted geometrical relations between objects” (Shapiro 84), reflects the underlying feeling that art should assert its independence from society and politics and forge a self-sufficient realm of its own.

Shapiro observes that few painters felt it necessary to produce comprehensive

statements of intent; this was a task left to the propagandists whose aim was to “make modern art comprehensible to prospective supporters and the public at large”. However, “in awakening public interest and gaining support they also propagated misconceptions and misleading simplifications of the painters’ intentions” (89). Many painters spoke in terms of “revolution” and “struggle,” terms synonymous with leftist rhetoric, yet their actual conception of the connection between art and revolution, as Shapiro believes, emerged as being far from leftist. Apollinaire might have thought Duchamp was destined to reconcile art and the people, but was Duchamp himself prepared to relinquish his status? As has been mentioned, most avant-garde artists were revolutionary up to the point where their own status was threatened. These artists promoted a condition of equality for everyone else, but most proved not politically committed enough to dispense with their own human individuality and creative freedom, to relinquish the status from which they derived their livelihood.

Thus, though Cubism has a somewhat conflicting past, I do not feel this justifies an interpretation of Cubism in the manner of Bürger’s theory of the avant-garde. Whilst Metzinger, Picasso, and Braque might have made moves towards a dialogue with popular culture in the wake of the crises of 1911, it would seem that they in fact had no intention whatsoever of reintegrating themselves into the rank and file of everyday life. However, it must be acknowledged that Bürger, if controversially, and perhaps due to the ambiguity of the “intended aesthetic effects” of collage, does not include Cubism in his definition of the historical avant-garde (Bürger 74). Bürger writes that the Cubists’ intention to “sublate” art into external reality, via the technique of collage, can “best be defined as tentative” (74). Although the Cubists are destroying traditional concepts of art and the representation of reality, they are not calling into question the existence of art itself; they shy away from “a total shaping of the pictorial space as a continuum” (Bürger 78). In Bürger’s terms, Cubism is still involving itself in “system-immanent” criticism and has not approached the stage of “self-criticism” that he alleges the later avant-garde movements did (21). Bürger writes: “Although cubism does not pursue the same intent, it calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance. For this reason, it is part of the historic

avant-garde movements” (109; fn. 4). If Bürger’s theory cannot be applied to Cubism, then it follows that Puchner’s theory cannot either. Indeed, from the evidence examined it would seem that the function of the Cubist “manifestos” was not to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, but to legitimise or clarify the movement’s objectives.

In Gray’s interpretation, although under the circumstances, and due to the threat of sterility, Braque might have accepted the “necessity for rules” that bound art to life, he retained the conviction that “true art must transcend them” (140). Also discussed was Picasso’s conviction that although the artist’s function is to communicate his aesthetic insight to society, art remains autonomous (Gray 153). As is the message of the only “manifesto” of the Cubist movement, art was not made to be understood but rather “to move, to dominate, to direct” and to impose itself upon the masses (“On Cubism” qtd. in Harrison and Wood 201). Thus, whilst there might be slight room for Bürger’s theory to operate, such a theory is heavily thrown into question by the overwhelming evidence in favour of Cubism as an ultimately autonomous art construct. As Green’s insight sums it up, “radical avant-garde status could go with comparatively conservative ideological connections” (2). Although this amalgam of radicalism and conservative separatism is perhaps, in today’s climate, difficult to grasp, similar paradoxes, as Marjorie Perloff discovers, can be found “everywhere in the arts of the *avant-guerre*” (6).

Chapter 3 – FUTURISM

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw not only the development of Cubism in France and Expressionism in Germany but also the birth and growth of the Italian Futurist movement led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Whilst it is still customary to regard Cubism and Futurism as contrasting movements whose aesthetics “were fundamentally opposed, thus necessitating a choice between the *l’art pour l’art* classicism of Cubism and the expressionistic dynamism of Futurism” (Martin xxix), Futurism in fact borrowed certain techniques from Cubism. Whilst Umberto Boccioni declared in 1912 that the Futurists were “absolutely opposed to [Cubist] art” (“Exhibitors” 46), Gino Severini had no qualms about admitting that the Futurist collages “were born in 1912 in the zone of Montmartre” (117), that is, that they were derived from Picasso and the Cubists. However, as Severini adds, it is clear that the Futurists were quick to adapt the Cubist model to their own political purposes.

Futurism certainly had an overt political bent as can be seen in 1909 when the founding and manifesto of Futurism was immediately followed by the “First Political Manifesto of Futurism.” The existence of this manifesto is evidence that supports Puchner’s hypothesis that the mere existence of avant-garde manifestos is sufficient to suggest that the avant-garde went some way in achieving its aim to reintegrate itself into life, in this instance, into politics. This manifesto states clearly that the only political programme of the Futurists consists of “national pride, energy and expansion” (Marinetti 1). Marinetti, as author of the piece, claims to want a “national representation devoid of mummies and freed from vile pacifism” (1). Thus, Marjorie Perloff concludes that the Futurists, being more politically inclined than the Cubists, “reconceived collage as a propaganda art, an art that directly bombards the senses” (54). According to Günter Berghaus, “Marinetti had always conceived his movement as a force of artistic *and* political innovation. His project of cultural rejuvenation had always been conjoined with social and political renewal” (9). Perloff even refers to certain of Marinetti’s artistic manifestos themselves as art forms, as “collage works of a new kind,” and describes Marinetti’s argument as “reductive enough to make for compelling propaganda” (57). According to the

Russian Futurist Kasimir Malevich, “Cubist construction is formed from the most varied units in a definite organisation” (101), that is, it “remained, despite its great innovations, rooted in pictorial synthesis” (Perloff 65). The idea is that contradictions composed in such a harmonious manner can only produce stasis. Futurism, on the other hand, Malevich argues, inspired by the new age of the machine, replaces pictorial harmony with dynamism, speed and energy. The Futurists, Perloff concludes, longed “to make an art coterminous with life,” and eventually “to obliterate the distinction between the pictorial field and the ‘real’ world outside the frame” (71; 77). If such a conclusion with regard to Futurist intention can be confirmed, what remains to be deduced in the course of this chapter is the means by which the Futurists intended to obliterate the distinction between art and life. In other words, did the Futurists aim to synthesise art and life by abolishing art as an institution and reintegrating it into life, thereby confirming the chief theory in question, or did they have a different method in mind?

(i) The Founding of Futurism

When it came to the production of manifestos the Futurists were some of the most prolific avant-gardists of the era; the art manifesto is considered by many to be the “master genre of futurism” (Puchner, *Poetry* 75). As Martin Puchner writes, “The first person to systematically employ this title [“manifesto”] was the former symbolist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti” (*Poetry* 72). It could be inferred from this that Puchner’s theory – that the mere existence of avant-garde manifestos is evidence enough to support Bürger’s theory that the avant-garde intended to reintegrate art into the praxis of life – does not take into account the preceding movements of Expressionism and Cubism, but begins with Futurism. Indeed, Marjorie Perloff writes: “The Futurist manifesto marks the transformation of what had traditionally been a vehicle for political statement into a literary, one might say, quasi-poetic construct” (82). Perloff believes that, whilst the genealogy of the Futurist manifesto can be traced back to the nineteenth-century political manifesto and to the manifestos of other turn-of-the-century movements, the Italian Futurist manifestos differ from their precursors in “their brash refusal to remain in the expository or critical corner, their understanding that the group pronouncement,

sufficiently aestheticized, can, in the eyes of the mass audience, all but take the place of the promised art work” (85). Thus, “the theory [of the manifesto] is the practice” (90). In other words, as Cinzia Blum puts it, “Perloff locates the originality of the Futurist manifesto in its hybrid, multi-faceted nature” (196). Essentially, Perloff identifies a crossover between Futurist manifestos and Futurist poetry. Blum herself observes that Marinetti’s first Futurist manifesto “marks the creation of a new genre straddling poetic and theoretical discourse – a collective statement directed as a mass audience, in which the articulation of an aesthetic and political programme is transformed into a literary construct” (196). In 1913 Marinetti wrote to Gino Sevrino, lecturing him on the “arte di far manifesto” (art of making manifestos). Here Marinetti insisted on the lucid presentation of ideas which was to be achieved by employing the correct names and labels (from Marinetti’s own lexicon of key Futurist terms), the use of brief and concise modes of expression (involving techniques not unlike those used in poetry), and the highlighting of key points (largely by means of enumeration) (“Letter” 295).

According to Puchner, Marinetti modelled the Futurist aesthetic on the manifesto so fully that “the artistic realization of this program through the making of artworks became a secondary concern” (*Poetry* 76). Some might argue that it follows from the analysis of this new genre, in line with Puchner’s argument, that the existence of the Futurist manifesto is evidence not simply of the avant-garde’s desire to reintegrate art into the praxis of life but also of its success in doing so.

Typographically, the most creative of the Futurist manifestos was “Futurist Anti-tradition: Manifesto = Synthesis,” which played with visual rhetoric as well as “poetic constructs,” and was written by Apollinaire for Marinetti in 1913.

Apollinaire, granting himself poetic licence, applied Marinetti’s technique of “words in freedom” which is examined later. This manifesto was only a reiteration of what had already been stated by Marinetti in his own manifestos, but it presented a discerning selection of Futurism’s most fundamental principles. Furthermore, “Futurist Anti-tradition” was published in the literary journal *Lacerba* whose readership was “approximately four-fifths working class” (Perloff 36), and thus it can convincingly be argued that manifestos intended and succeeded in “bringing art to the people.” The title of Apollinaire’s manifesto, “Manifesto = Synthesis,” could,

alone, act as a mnemonic for Perloff's theory that the Futurist manifesto represented an overlapping of art form and political medium.

It will be impossible to examine all the writings of the Futurists in the course of this chapter, but the ones bearing relevance to the issue of art's autonomy have been selected for analysis. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" was written by Marinetti in 1909 and first published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*. In Italy, at the beginning of the twentieth century, parliamentary democracy was undergoing considerable development, and the 1909 manifesto reflects this trend away from archaic institutions and towards a more liberal society. The manifesto opens with an emotional short story – relating the struggle of Marinetti and his friends to emancipate "the *living* of the earth" (21) – which exemplifies the "literary constructs" Perloff identifies. Resonant of nineteenth-century activist political manifestos, the rhetoric of this manifesto is full of bombast; its tone is aggressive and inflammatory. Presumably this can be seen as a harnessing of political tactics in order to attract widespread attention and incite the public to action. Extracting the parts most relevant to this study, the manifesto reads:

We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind. . . . We mean to free her [Italy] from the number of museums that cover her like so many graveyards. . . . Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! . . . Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded. Art, in fact, can be nothing but violence, cruelty and injustice (22-23).

At first glance it would indeed seem that Bürger is justified in including Italian Futurism in his class of movements who "do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art but reject that art in its entirety" and, in their most "extreme manifestations," whose "primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society" (109, fn. 4). Bürger admits that his inclusion of Futurism has "certain limitations that would have to be determined through concrete analyses" (109). Jochen Schulte-Sasse, in his introductory essay, "Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde," unconditionally includes Futurism in the group of movements that Bürger's theory can be applied to (x). Without taking Schulte-Sasse's assumption for granted, "concrete analyses" of the manifestos of the Futurist movement will be undertaken throughout this chapter in

order to determine the exact extent to which Futurism intended to abolish art as an institution and by that means to reintegrate it into life.

“The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” calls, unmistakably, for a destruction of the institution of art in the form of “museums, libraries and academies,” and goes so far as to vividly depict such annihilation with images of libraries ablaze and flooded museums. It is not possible then, from this first manifesto of Futurism, to determine the “certain limitations” that Bürger stated should be placed on an inclusion of Futurism in his theory. Although the first manifesto was intended to apply to all creative endeavours, as Marianne Martin identifies, “its origins and immediate relevance were predominately literary” since Marinetti’s attempts to venture into the plastic arts found him in unfamiliar territory (44). Thus, after a year of working single-handedly, Marinetti felt it was necessary to encourage and demonstrate the involvement in his movement of artists from non-literary fields such as painting and music.

(ii) The Futurist Painters

The second artistic manifesto of Futurism was written not by Marinetti, though he more than likely edited it, but by a collaborative band of Futurist painters, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, in 1910. With a few references to the figurative arts, the second manifesto more or less reiterates the arguments of the first manifesto. In part, the “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” reads:

We will fight with all our might the fanatical, senseless and snobbish religion of the past, a religion encouraged by the vicious existence of museums. We rebel against that spineless worshipping of old canvases, old statues and old bric-a-brac. . . . Living art draws its life from the surrounding environment. . . . We declare war on all artists and all institutions which insist on hiding behind a façade of false modernity, while they are actually ensnared by tradition, academicism. . . . Support and glory in our day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious Science (24-26).

Again, we have rejection of the past and the establishment alongside a heralding of the dynamism of contemporary life and the promise of a magnificent future. The “Manifesto of Futurist Painters” was subject to attack from those who

thought the painters should focus more on their commitment to the figurative arts and not so much on the ideology of the Futurist movement in general. Thus, five weeks after the publication of the painters' first manifesto, they issued a second, "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," in which they took a defensive stance:

[Previously] we were concerned . . . with relation between ourselves and society. Today, instead, with this second manifesto, we resolutely shake off all relative considerations and ascend to the highest expressions of the pictorial absolute (Taylor, J. 125).

In this document there are still traces of the painters' wish to "at any price . . . re- enter into life," and to take on "Nature and not the museum as the one and only standard" (28-29).¹¹ However, there is also a clear and conscientious formulation of their central artistic principle of dynamism, a pivotal tenet of the Futurist movement as a whole. Traditional form and colour were no longer sufficient for these revolutionary painters, but they had to take care to clarify the distinction between their work and non-Futurist avant-garde art. Part of their exposition of dynamism can be read as follows:

The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed *moment* in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the *dynamic sensation* itself. Indeed, all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. . . . On account of the persistency of an image upon the retina, moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad career. Thus a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular (27).

This technical manifesto made concrete the concept of dynamism outlined in Marinetti's Manifesto, and became the leading theoretical statement of early Futurism. Clearly the Futurists wanted to destroy one-point perspective and to instil motion into their work, to portray multiple view-points and times simultaneously. This technique was known as *Simultaneità* and represented the Futurist synthesis not only of different atmospheres, of fact and idea, but of different times and different places. To depict a running horse with twenty legs is a classic example of Futurist *Simultaneità*. Later on, in an article, "The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic," Marinetti was to write "we create the new aesthetics of speed. We have almost abolished the concept of space and notably diminished the concept of time. We are thus preparing

¹¹ Alternative translations of the same manifesto are used when it is felt necessary.

the ubiquity of multiplied man. We will thus arrive at the abolition of the year, the day, and the hour" (81).

The painters' technical manifesto was elaborated upon only in 1912 with Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" and Boccioni's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture," but the core principles remained unchanged. These manifestos are of use in substantiating the ideological concepts and aims of Futurism, but the technicalities of Futurist artistic, sculptural and poetical methods are not of primary importance to this study. However, the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" lends some interesting insights into the Futurist equation of art and life. Point five of the Manifesto states that "every noun should have its double; that is, the noun should be followed, with no conjunction, by the noun to which it is related by analogy. Example: man-torpedo-boat, woman-gulf, crowd-surf, piazza-funnel, door-faucet" (84-85). Marinetti continues that, whereas "up to now writers have been restricted to immediate analogies," Futurist writers should hope to promote an "*ever-vaster gradation of analogies*, . . . even deeper and more solid affinities, however remote" (85). Marinetti concludes that "analogy is nothing more than the deep love that assembles distant, seemingly diverse and hostile things" (85). He elucidates that art in the form of music can only engage with the "life of matter" by means of the "most extensive analogies," implying that all art forms should aspire to the condition of music as far as the breadth of its analogies is concerned. It seems that the practice of bringing together the most remote entities has been applied to the more general but chief analogy of the whole Futurist movement, that between art and life. The art-life analogy sees Futurist artists juxtapose two seemingly polar elements with the aim of creating a dynamic synthesis in the name of universality. According to Berghaus, "life was to be changed through art, and art to become a part of life" (47), so that the art-life analogy becomes an art-life fusion, a "new reality" that would exist under the auspices of a Futurist State. Timothy Mathews talks of the Futurist attempt to "re-create the world in terms of difference-dissolving images" (110). The "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" ends with the declaration:

Futurist poets! I have taught you to hate libraries and museums, to prepare you *to hate the intelligence*, reawakening in you divine intuition, the characteristic gift of the Latin races. Through intuition we will conquer the seemingly unconquerable hostility that separates out human flesh from the metal of motors (89).

Marinetti clearly believes that it is through intuitive knowledge that the most extensive analogies are to be achieved. Thus we must reject anything that is learnt via the intellect, throw away our books and shun our old masters, if we are to unite art and life, imagination and matter, human and machine.

(iii) Umberto Boccioni

In accordance with the painters' Manifesto, Boccioni's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture" diametrically opposes Impressionist sculptor Medardo Rosso's revolutionary work which "gives a sense of vibrant immediacy to his works, but necessitates a rapid execution from life which deprives a work of art of any elements of universality" (62). The Futurists are aiming for the breaking down of all boundaries, for the amalgamation of all oppositions, for collective dynamism as opposed to segregated stasis. All that is contained and finite must be "split open": on the smaller scale, the style of the individual artworks, on the larger scale, the art world itself as it exists in institutionalised bourgeois society. As Boccioni puts it in a later manifesto of 1913, "we are looking for a symbol, or better, a single form, to replace these old concepts of division with new concepts of continuity" (89). Boccioni then quotes philosopher Henri Bergson as saying: "Any division of matter into autonomous bodies with absolutely defined contours is an artificial division" (89).

Boccioni refers to this Futurist vision of his as "physical transcendentalism" and states that its effect on sculptural works will be to make them "live" by showing their "extensions in space as sensitive, systematic and plastic" ("Sculpture" 53). In "The Plastic Foundations of Futurist Sculpture and Painting" of 1913, Boccioni elaborates on his notion of physical transcendentalism, stating that it is helping to build a "system of plastic analogy" and through this to achieve a "plastic state of mind (able to adjust to changing circumstances)" (88). Boccioni believes that through the Futurist technique of physical transcendentalism we will begin to perceive "analogous phenomena, which have hitherto remained hidden from our obtuse sensibilities" (89). In other words, by transcending the conventionally established visual world it will be possible to see certain unexpected equivalences between entities previously thought to be incompatible. As Boccioni's "Technical

Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture” stated, “we want the entire visible world to tumble down on top of us, merging and creating a harmony on purely intuitive grounds” (63). And now again, in 1913, he states “the only important thing to remember is this: in Futurist art, the viewpoint has completely changed” (90). What Boccioni claims divides the Futurists from the Cubists is their total rejection of “any *a priori* reality” (90). For the Futurist artist, it is his own personal contemporary experiences that dictate what he puts on the canvas and not any pre-determined order of the intellect or the establishment. Experience is multi-faceted and changing, vivacious and dynamic; it is certainly not best expressed by the traditional technique of one-point perspective. The Futurist artist is intuitive and not intellectual, free to move, and not bound by the knowledge he has acquired from his predecessors.

In the same year Boccioni clarifies his notion of “plastic dynamism,” explicitly stating “we are anti-art; in other words we are against the stasis which has reigned for centuries in art” (“Plastic” 94). He explains that Futurist painting and sculpture cannot exist “enclosed in a traditional framework,” but only as part of their environment and in continual dynamic exchange with that environment. The following year, 1914, Boccioni also wrote the manifesto “Futurist Painting and Sculpture” in which he reinforces the notions of physical transcendentalism and plastic states of mind, and expands on the division between the Futurists and the Cubists. Boccioni feels that “although we have . . . in Picasso an attempt to go beyond conventional art . . . , the Cubists on the contrary take part in it” (174). That is, Boccioni shares the opinion of Bürger that although Cubism “calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective that has prevailed since the Renaissance, . . . it does not share [Futurism’s and the other historical avant-garde movements’] basic tendency [i.e. the sublation of art in the praxis of life]” (109, fn. 4)). The opinion is that Cubism participates in “system-immanent” criticism, whereas Futurism takes itself to the next level of “self-criticism” (Bürger 21). For Boccioni, Cubist art, which scientifically analyses and breaks down the object, “is always at the expense of the object itself” (173). The Futurists however find that it is possible to “build up something living” out of the dead parts and to arrive at a new creation (173). The Cubists criticise “the system” from within, but the Futurists claim to step outside the system and turn it on its head, to “live out . . . [the]

evolutionary concept” of their art and to “put the spectator in the centre of the picture” (176). Ultimately, Boccioni is claiming that the Futurists aim to bring art back to life.

(iv) Severini and Balla

Boccioni has dominated most of the manifesto writing examined so far, even playing the chief role in the writing of the painters’ collective manifesto. This may indeed affect the impression gleaned from the manifestos of the Futurist movement as a whole. However, some of the artists who participated in the writing of the painters’ Manifesto also turned their hands to solo efforts. In 1914 Gino Severini wrote “The Plastic Analogies of Dynamism” which should make it easier to determine if Boccioni’s efforts on behalf of the whole movement are a true representation, or are in fact misleading. Severini states: “We want to enclose the universe in the work of art. Individual objects do not exist any more” (118). Severini feels the end has come for painting and for the statue, autistic entities which are fated to end up in museums and collectors’ galleries. The new vision here is of plastic creations which “live in the open air and fit into architectural schemes . . . with which they will share the active intervention of [and communication with] the outside world” (125). Severini’s use of the term “enclose” when talking of the universe is rather ambiguous. It leaves room to wonder whether there is any part of the universe which is not also a part of art, whether life itself has not become one vast institution of art. On the other hand, “enclose” could simply mean “include” which would not mean that the universe is exclusive to the world of art, or that the art-world is in fact inescapable. This latter interpretation of the term would be more in line with Boccioni’s argument that all art must be a part of life, which does not imply that all life is necessarily a part of art; a vivification of art is something very different from an aestheticisation of life. There is indeed room for doubting an interpretation in the form of the latter sense of the term.

Modern commentator Mathews interprets Severini’s ambiguous line as representative of the Futurist desire to “abolish barriers in the relation of expression to experience,” and “to release, through expression, an assumed potential in perception to embrace and dominate the world” (110). Marianne Martin, in her

analysis of Severini's painting, *Danseuses jaunes* (Yellow Dancers), observes that "Severini had deepened and freed his perceptions so that reality, transformed by light, became first and foremost a quivering mosaic of multi-coloured facets which only incidentally assumed shapes resembling the furniture of the visible world" (102). Furthermore, in writing of Severini's *La Dance du Pan-Pan à Monico*, Martin notes: "The carnival colour and design, which almost overpower the onlooker's visual, auditory and kinetic responses, draw him still further into the life of the painting, so that, like everything else in the canvas, he is submerged in the feverish activity and infinitely multiplied rhythms" (103). But it is not just the commentators writing retrospectively who bolster the argument for an interpretation of Severini's manifesto that holds Futurism to be promoting an aestheticisation of life.

Indeed, in 1915, Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero wrote their manifesto entitled "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe." This title, in itself, implies a total overhaul of life. Delving deeper, alongside expected statements such as "with Futurism art has become action-art," the ambition can be found to "find abstract equivalents for all the forms and elements in the universe" (197). In "The Futurist Universe" of 1918, Balla then continues, "any store in a modern town, with its elegant windows all displaying useful and pleasing objects, is much more aesthetically enjoyable than all those passéist exhibitions which have been so lauded everywhere" (219). Even that which is traditionally utilitarian and is merely considered as a means to an end, far from being thought of as an object in itself, is to have a new aesthetic gloss cast over it. It seems, according to Balla, that every aspect of life was to be art; nothing was to be left untouched. Indeed, in 1915, Marinetti himself described Futurism as "a modern aesthetic most responsive to utility" which "has no need of royal palaces with domineering lines and granite foundations that loom massively out of the past" ("Birth" 80). As early as 1913, Balla went as far as to write the "Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing," dictating that "we must destroy all passéist clothes, and everything about them which is tight-fitting, colourless, funereal, decadent, boring and unhygienic" (132). The Futurists envisaged a bright future full of energy, and, according to Balla, the colours and shapes that corresponded to that renewed energy. Colours and styles should be bright, daring and innovative, from those of architecture even down to those of the

clothes on men's backs. The idea is that men's fashion should be more in line with women's fashion which "has always been more or less Futurist," according to Volt (Vincenzo Fani) in his "Futurist Manifesto of Women's Fashion" (514). "Fashion," Volt states, is "the female equivalent of Futurism. Speed, novelty, courage of creation" (514). But Volt wants to open up women's fashion to the "one hundred new revolutionary materials [that] riot in the piazza, demanding to be admitted into the making of womanly clothes" (515). "Every woman," Volt declares, "will be a walking synthesis of the universe" (515). So revolutionary art will form a synthesis with fashion and fashion will form a synthesis with the universe to form the perfect reconstruction of the universe in aesthetic terms.

Russian Futurism as such will not be dealt with until the next chapter, but in 1913, Russians Ilya Zdanevich and Mikhail Larionov wrote "Why we Paint Ourselves: A Futurist Manifesto," which seems to complement very well what Balla has written. Zdanevich and Larionov write: "We have joined art to life. After the long isolation of artists, we have loudly summoned life and life has invaded art, it is time for art to invade life. The painting of our faces is the beginning of the invasion" (81). Here, not only are clothes the new canvas, but also human skin. Art is not only encroaching upon the environment but upon mankind itself. The claim of the Russian artists is that there are two stages to achieving a Futurist state. The first one, that of the transformation of art, has already been achieved; the second one is on a much larger scale. The focus now is to be the transformation of all aspects of life, from politics and architecture, to cinema and the most banal. It would seem that Balla is not alone in his ambition which seems to be far greater than the rather more moderate one of Boccioni. For the moment, however, I would like to give Bürger the benefit of the doubt and adhere to Boccioni's claim that the Futurists ultimately aimed for a simple reintegration of art into the praxis of life.

It should be mentioned at this point, however, that Balla also provided some evidence in support of Scheunemann's theory that suggests Futurism was a reaction to advances in technology. In "The Late Balla – Futurist Balla" of 1915, Balla writes:

With the perfecting of photography, static traditionalist painting has completely fallen from repute. . . . It is imperative therefore not to halt and contemplate the corpse of tradition, but to renew ourselves by

creating an art that no machine can imitate, that only artistic Creative Genius can achieve. . . . Analysis reality abandoned definitively. Creation new Futurist style: synthetic abstract subjective dynamic forms (206).

At a pinch, the drive to produce an art that is not mechanically reproducible can be seen as an ambition in itself, and the sole aim of the Futurist movement. However, rather more probable would be the suggestion that this drive was the impetus for the movement and that from there the Futurists developed an independent ideology and higher reaching goals than simply an evasion of the death knell of photography. Although, if the Futurists managed to achieve their aim of reintegrating art into the praxis life and to regain art's acceptability as an essential and inseparable element of that life, this would be the ultimate way to safeguard their work from the blows of new technology. In the words of Futurists Bruno Corradini and Emilio Settimelli, once the "snobbish passéism of art-as-ideal, of art-as-sublime-holy-inaccessible, of art-as-torment-purity-vow-solitude-disdain for reality" has been destroyed, "the artist will finally find his place along with the butcher and the tyre-manufacturer, the grave-digger and the speculator, the engineer and the farmer," safe from the fate of being made redundant in the wake of the machine age (147). Commentator Russell Berman cannot understand why Bürger attempts to define the emergence of the avant-garde "solely in terms of the development of the institution of art, with no reference to broader social transformations" (46). Berman describes Bürger's theory as "a sort of expanded intrinsic criticism, as if the economic changes around the turn of the century and the subsequent political upheavals bore no relation to aesthetic developments" (46). Berman is wise in suggesting that a theory of the avant-garde must include both ideological and material definitions.

(v) "Imagination without Strings"

Returning now to Marinetti as the anchor of the movement, it should be possible to look for further confirmation of his intentions for Futurism in the manifestos that followed his 1909 statement. In 1913, Marinetti wrote a specifically literary manifesto entitled "Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words in Freedom." Whilst allowing himself to delve more deeply into the precise literary techniques of Futurist writing, he provides some further insights into more

general Futurist ideology. Marinetti commands the Futurist lyricists to “spit on the Altar of Art” and incites them to produce lyricism “with no taste of the book about it but, rather, as much as possible the taste of life” (104). This refers to an art that consistently gives us a taste of life and not necessarily a life that resembles art to such a degree that it becomes, thereby, indistinguishable from it. Marinetti wants to breathe life into, and become one with, his lyrics. For example, to represent the life of a blade of grass, he proposes the line: “Tomorrow I’ll be greener” (100), thus making use of the poetic technique of personification. Also initiated is the “constant, audacious use of onomatopoeia” which “vivifies lyricism with crude and brutal elements of reality” (104). Marinetti wants to abolish all stylistic conventions and restrictions with the aim of “giving the greatest number of vibrations and a deeper synthesis of life” (104). The idea is that by causing their lyrics to resonate, the poem will enter the life of the reader physically rather than just conceptually. “I do not want to suggest an idea or sensation with passéist airs and graces,” Marinetti declares, “instead I want to grasp them brutally and hurl them in the reader’s face” (105). It would seem that here Marinetti’s intentions go no further than the goal of vivifying and socialising art; they do not appear to enter the next level with the desire to aestheticise all that comes under the banner of “life”.

In 1914 Marinetti also wrote another solo piece entitled “Geometric and Mechanical Splendour and the Numerical Sensibility.” Here Marinetti talks of the Futurists’ growing attraction to physical matter and speaks of the will to “enrich lyricism with brute reality” in order to keep it from becoming “too abstract or *artistic*” (158). This, no doubt, is in accordance with the intentions expressed in earlier manifestos, but not everything is so unambiguous. In speaking of the reverberation of chiming bells, Marinetti writes rather aggressively, “I take hold of reality with an act of will that subjects and deforms the very vibration of the metal in an original manner” (159). It is probable that Marinetti simply means that he ensures he has a strong enough grasp on reality when creating his poetry to be able to imbue it with some sort of physicality or life force. Alternatively, such a statement could imply that Marinetti intends to manipulate reality and pull it into the shape that he desires, making an artwork out of external reality. Marinetti had never expressed such a desire prior to this, so for the moment it will be best to work with the former

interpretation. However, it should be noted that by 1915 and the publication of his essay "War, the World's Only Hygiene," Marinetti was at least showing signs that could be construed as a desire to aestheticise life, though his stance still remained ambiguous.

(vi) Marinetti and Mussolini

It was also in the course of 1915 that personal contacts were established between Marinetti and Benito Mussolini. In November 1914 Mussolini had been expelled from the Italian Socialist Party due to his pro-interventionist line and theory of a "revolutionary war," and had begun to go his own way, which would result in the founding of the Fascist Party, the *Fasci di Combattimento*, five years later. Marinetti shared Mussolini's nationalist line along with his revolutionary politics. Both men felt that, after the continued failure of the *Risorgimento*, the unification of Italy, to bring about a return to Italy's former colonial glory and a revitalisation of the country's political, economic and social life, it was only through war that Italy could restore its grandeur and be transformed into a new and modern nation cleansed of all bourgeois ills. Many Italian Futurists were to be drawn towards Fascism in the coming years in support of modernising a country and an economy that was split between the stunted industrial revolution in the North and the rural, backward South. The nineteenth century bourgeois values of individualism, capitalism and materialism now took second place to the ideal of a national community, the "fatherland." As Marinetti puts it in his essay "Beyond Communism": "The fatherland is the greatest extension of the individual, or better: the largest individual capable of living at length, of directing, mastering and defending every part of its body" (149). In Berghaus' terms, both the Futurists and the Fascists "combined a Leftist social policy with a Rightist concept of nation and government" (9). In 1914, on the eve of the First World War, Giolotti and his liberal government had been toppled and Marinetti and Mussolini watched their dream take shape.

(vii) The effect of the outbreak of war on manifesto writing.

Inspired by the start of war and perhaps also by his new found contact, in 1915 Marinetti published his manifesto entitled "War, the World's Only Hygiene,"

elaborating on a point first expressed in his Manifesto of 1909. Marinetti speaks of his happiness at finally experiencing “this great Futurist hour of Italy,” having for so long “glorified the love of danger and violence” and “praised patriotism and war.” Then, interestingly, Marinetti calls upon all “Futurist poets, painters, sculptors and musicians of Italy!” to set aside, for the duration of the war, “verse, . . . brushes, scalpels and orchestras!” since there is nothing to be admired but the “symphonies of the shrapnels and the mad sculptures that our inspired artillery moulds among the masses of the enemy” (1). This is clearly not a case of bringing art to life, and is rather a case of bringing life (in this case in the form of war) in line with art, in an aestheticisation of violence. However, in the opinion of Berghaus, “War, the World’s Only Hygiene” still retained a “mystical union of art, life, beauty and war” (248). Berghaus compares this manifesto to Marinetti’s 1935 manifesto, the “Futurist Aesthetics of War,” which he states went “far beyond” the mystical union of “War, the World’s Only Hygiene,” to become pure “imperialist propaganda” and a “mere eulogy to Mussolini” and his Fascist government with whom the Futurists had formed an alliance in the post-war period and who had come to power in 1922 (248).

In 1918 Marinetti had founded the *Partito Politico Futurista* (Futurist Political Party) which had been absorbed a year later by Mussolini’s Fascist Party. In 1920, the Futurist-Fascist alliance had broken down: Mussolini wanted to shun his revolutionary reputation in order to curry favour with the conservative middle classes; Marinetti was no longer able to see “a possibility for the Futurist revolution to be realised in alliance with nationalist forces” that were evolving towards the Right. However, by 1925 Marinetti could stay away no longer. Marinetti had realised his movement could not deter the threat of marginalisation without a rapprochement with the Fascist regime by way of compromise. The years that followed largely consisted of Marinetti’s attempts to battle against the insignificant role of Futurism in Fascist cultural policies; a “second wave” of Futurism took shape. As a result, in 1935, Marinetti writes in his manifesto on the Ethiopian Colonial War:

For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as anti-aesthetic. . . . Accordingly we state: . . . War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. . . . Poets and artists of Futurism! . . .

remember these principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art . . . may be illumined by them ("On the Italo-Abyssinian War" 241-242).

Shortly after reading this manifesto, Benjamin comes to the conclusion that the Fascists believe in letting "art prevail though the world perish" ("Fiat ars – pereat mundus") ("Work" 242). In Benjamin's mind this aestheticisation of life is the culmination of *l'art pour l'art* and is the furthest it could be from a Communist socialisation of art, from *l'art pour la vie*. It is rather *la vie pour l'art* which, becomes *l'art pour l'art* as life itself becomes art. This is such an extreme autonomy of art that it subsumes and sublates life. It could be argued that the distinction Benjamin forges between the art of Fascism and that of Communism is merely a theoretical sleight of hand with the aim of denying any continuity between avant-gardism (which Benjamin understands as the politicisation of art) and totalitarian ideas. However, this distinction is widely recognised and is, for the purposes of this study, to be taken as valid. Benjamin writes:

'*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*', says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of '*l'art pour l'art*'. . . . [Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicising art (242).

It must be remembered that the Marinetti of 1935 was a Marinetti beholden to Mussolini for the position his Futurists held in the Fascist state. However, in spite of such eulogies as "Futurist Aesthetics of War," all attempts to get Futurism recognised as the official art form of the Fascist State were thwarted by Mussolini's increasingly conservative cultural policies. Although many members of the Futurist movement were reviled by Marinetti's pragmatic approach, his ideological twists and political turns, for a while some believed that under Mussolini there might be a chance of realising their visions of the future. Berghaus explains this, stating that several Futurists, Marinetti included if the evidence previously examined is to be believed, imagined for a while that their "concept of bridging the gap between art and life would have a chance of being realised in a Fascist State," because "art did not occupy an autonomous status as in the old system, but merged with the sphere of

politics” (10). However, as the Futurists soon found out, “the Fascist rhetoric of modernity had little in common with how the Futurist envisaged the future of Italy” (Berghaus 10). If the Futurists wanted a politicised art – “Italian modernists, much more than other European modernists, had a political vocation, with a strong nationalist connotation” (Gentile 31) – Fascism wanted an aestheticised politics, and although there is at times a very fine line between the two, causing many Futurists to fall in with the Fascists, the consequences of each approach are vastly at odds with each other.

A culmination of the socialisation of art might look something like the social experiment carried out at the Abbaye de Créteil between 1906 and 1908, which so inspired Marinetti in his early days and “served as a model for his later attempts to break down the autonomous position of art in the bourgeois world and to fuse it with life as experienced in the modern age” (Berghaus 37). The Abbaye de Créteil was a commune that achieved fame throughout Europe for its fusion of art and life in a socialist vision. The Abbaye aimed to escape the corruption and commercialism of the bourgeois art market, and to evade the restraints of traditional artistic practice in order to bring art to the people, thereby reviving them spiritually. The Marinetti of his pre-Futurist days was attracted to all “revolutionary” movements, from either end of the political spectrum; he favoured the social policies of the Socialists, yet the sympathy he felt for the foreign policies of the nationalists was to lead him down the path to entanglement with Mussolini and an aesthetics of war.

The culmination of an aestheticisation of life is considered, with hindsight, to result in the extreme societies of ultra-right-wing governments, societies that could not be further in their way of life from that of the Abbaye de Créteil. These are societies living under a false or illusory synthesis of art and life, what Benjamin calls the “consummation of *l’art pour l’art*.” Everything is done in the name of art and everything is given an aesthetic gloss, from the most horrendous atrocities to the most utilitarian object. Such a state of affairs lent a disproportionate standing to myths in society. A merging of art and life in such a manner also meant a merging of fact and fiction, truth and falsehood, to such a degree that they could not be distinguished from one another. Only those elite few in power knew what was real and what was merely propaganda. Life or “reality” could be moulded as the

government required; in an instant idea could become fact and fact could become fiction. Life was one vast canvas waiting for the *Duce's* next brushstroke to dictate the shape things would take. The destruction of libraries, museums, and galleries, in the name of freedom of creativity, also helped in the eradication of history and the masking of anything against which false facts could be measured and found wanting.

The conclusion is that Marinetti, as is evident from his earlier manifestos written in the "first wave" of Futurism, was not the exclusive Fascist sympathiser he is made out to be; and following that, that Futurism is not necessarily a straightforward representation of the Fascist aestheticisation of politics. Futurism's early intentions were genuinely focussed on reintegrating art into the praxis of life, and if segments of the movement strayed from the track for the sake of survival, this should not alter a classification of Futurist intentions as a whole. Berghaus speaks of the publication of Marinetti's diary in 1987, and how it revealed that the commonly conceived impression of his relationship with Mussolini is misleading. This is probably what led to the instinctive objections to Futurism's inclusion in Bürger's theory. Berghaus admits: "I, like most scholars, had taken their public statements of mutual friendship and admiration at face value" (viii). As more and more information becomes available it seems that the history of the Futurist role within the early Fascist movement is not what it at first seems. The commonly held opinion that Futurism was the State Art of the Fascist regime needs to be revised.

Thus, I would conclude that it is perfectly viable for Bürger to include Futurism in the group of historical avant-garde movements which he claims aimed to endue art with life by abolishing art as an institution. It is understandable that he expressed reservations about doing so, suggesting there were certain limitations to such an inclusion, since, from 1915 onwards Marinetti's relationship with Mussolini led him to veer towards heralding an abolition of the institution of art via an extension of its boundaries to house all of life itself. Not only was Marinetti affected by the growing wave of Fascism, but Balla also showed strong signs of a desire to aestheticise life. Although as early as 1913 Balla had written the "Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing," it was in 1915 that he began to have designs on the whole world with his ambitious "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe."

(viii) Futurism under the Red Flag

There is of course alternative evidence against the common interpretation of Futurism as the art of Fascism. Between the years of 1920 and 1925, when Marinetti and Mussolini were estranged, Marinetti, feeling isolated, re-entered into dialogue with the Communists whom he had previously turned his back on. There were many points of similarity between the Futurists and the Communists, but the relationship proved to be a “marriage of incompatible partners” (Berghaus 197). Two factors prevented continued co-operation between the two groups: Marinetti’s unbending adherence to nationalist ideology, and his belief in a social elite. Marinetti would not compromise on these two points, believing that a Futurist State would be directed by an avant-garde of artists who could lead the masses into a liberated future society. This future society promised a better quality of life in a modern Italy with a re-established national identity.

The “Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party” of 1918 had a definite Left-wing, revolutionary stance, but it by no means propagated a society based on the Marxist model of abolishing class society and capitalism. As Marinetti says in his article “Beyond Communism” of 1920, “it is not a matter of a struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat” (153). Marinetti claims the Futurists are “in no mood to take directions from anyone, nor, as creative Italians, to copy the Russian Lenin, disciple of the German Marx. . . . The Russian Revolution has its *raison d’être* in Russia. . . . It cannot be imported into Italy” (148, 152). He continues, “Let’s not forget that the Italian people, notably bristling with sharp individualisms, is the most anti-Communist and dreams of individualist anarchy” (152). Still, Marinetti’s left-wing orientation was such that Antoni Gramsci was not alone in seeing the potential for a Futurist-Communist collaboration along the lines of the Russian model. Although Marinetti was in favour of an avant-garde elite he somewhat counteracts this with his desire to “multiply the artist-creators” so that one day “we will have a race almost entirely composed of artists” (156). Gramsci was the leader of the Italian branch of *Proletkult* in Turin. *Proletkult* was initially a Russian organisation, founded in 1917, with the communist aim of “encouraging artistic expression among the working classes, educating the masses in cultural matters, and discovering genuine talent amongst amateur artists in factories and workshops” (Berghaus 180).

In other words, Gramsci and his associates wanted to incorporate art into people's life praxis. The collaboration between *Proletkult* and the Futurists led to the foundation of a Futurist Syndicate of Artists in 1923 following the formal constitution of a Turin branch of the Futurist Movement. The Syndicate was a co-operative between workers and artists and had the ambition to enhance the proletariat's engagement with culture by establishing a socially-relevant art. This seems to have been a definite practical advance on previous examples of the Futurist attempt to achieve an interpenetration of art and life.

(ix) *Rapprochement*

In the meantime, however, Marinetti was re-orientating himself back to Mussolini, as a comparison between the Syndicate's manifestos of 1923 and 1924 reveals. The first publication of the Syndicate, written by Tullio Alpinolo Bracci and Fillia (Luigi Colombo), was entitled "Turin Futurist Movement: Futurist Syndicate of Artists," and, as might be expected, speaks of Futurist Workers and artists as being the creative centres of the world. The artistic values of the past have been turned aside and classical culture has been substituted for schools with a practical focus. However, the Syndicate's political-artistic manifesto of the following year published in *Il Futurismo* showed that the Syndicate was starting to re-orientate its direction. This time there was no mention of Futurism as the proletarian art of the future, no mention of a workers' and artists' co-operative. The re-orientation appears to be a propagandistic manoeuvre in order to ensure that Futurist paintings would be accepted in exhibitions of the now Fascist State; it mirrored Marinetti's move to comply with the Fascist regime and to affirm "The Artistic Rights Promoted by Italian Futurists," which he had signed on behalf of "all Futurist groups in Italy." The manifesto reads:

Futurism has given rise to numerous Futurist movements outside Italy, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with their political attitudes, such as the Bolshevik orientation of Russian Futurism after having become Art of the State. Futurism is an artistic and ideological movement and only intervenes in the political battle at an hour of grave danger for the Nation (195).

It would seem from the Syndicate's 1924 programme that the leaders of the Syndicate were swayed by Marinetti's policy of *rapprochement* with Mussolini.

However, by no means all of the Syndicate's members were happy with the outcome, expressing their distaste for Marinetti's political manoeuvres and allegiances. The manoeuvre demonstrates the desperation of various chief Futurists to maintain a role for their movement on the Fascist stage. In order to do so the Futurists had to put aside any anarchic revolutionary inclinations and conform to the increasing conservatism of Mussolini's government. Marinetti was never much of a political activist, nor a *poète engagé*; he was first and foremost an artist whose very particular *Weltanschauung* led him to dream of a Utopian State "founded on art and directed by artists" (Nazzsaro qtd. in Berghaus 221). Marinetti was prepared to conform to whichever political extreme he thought might carry him nearer to his goal, even if he had to kowtow and compromise his methods along the way. Thus, in collaboration with Communism, Marinetti's Utopian State looked much like a larger version of the society of the Abbaye de Créteil, where art was the means to a spiritually fulfilled life, and where everyone was an artist. Yet, under Fascism, a state "founded on art" came to mean a state subsumed by art; a state "directed by artists" meant rather a state under the total control of an avant-garde elite.

(x) Beyond Communism; Futurist Life.

In "Beyond Communism" of 1920, Marinetti is already claiming that the Futurists are aiming "beyond" a Communist revolution, that they are "more revolutionary" with their "marvellous anarchic paradise of absolute freedom, art, talent, progress, heroism, fantasy . . ." (154). Marinetti describes the Futurist revolution as one that will bring "art and the artists to power" and as one that will thereby "solve the problem of well-being in the only way it can be solved: spiritually" (155, 156). The idea is to "solve the social problem artistically," and Marinetti goes on to explain just how this will be done: The "human capacity to live the ideal life of lines, forms, colours, rhythms, sounds, and noises combined by genius" is to be increased to such an extent that "the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labour, nor a life of idleness either, but *a work of art*" and "every man will live his best possible novel" (154, 157). Marinetti describes the artists in power as "the proletariat of gifted men" and speaks of his vision of them creating "fountains of harmony streaming day and night from musical

genius and blooming in the sky, to colour, . . . reinvigorate, and refresh the dark, hard, banal, convulsive rhythm of daily life" (155). Open-air theatre and exhibitions will be "free to all," music will "reign all over the world" and "every town and city square will have its great instrumental and vocal orchestra" (155).

Ironically, Marinetti did attempt to provide an "institutional" framework for this Futurist art which led to the creation of many *Case d'Arte* (Houses of Art), exhibition spaces, and arts and crafts shops whereby the Futurists sought to popularise their avant-garde notions of art. Furthermore, Marinetti felt that "art must be an alcohol, not a balm" (156). In other words, art should not just be soothing and appeasing; it should be intoxicating and transport the recipient into the realm of dreams. Marinetti comes close to Balla's intention to "reconstruct the universe" when he states: "Every brain should have its palette and its musical instrument for colouring and lyrically accompanying every small act of life, even the humblest" (156). Marinetti also held forth not only on Futurist cinema, theatre, music, dance and architecture but also on such non-artistic aspects of life as marriage and the family, women, love, lust, cuisine, diet, fashion, furnishings, play, sport, walking and even sleep.

Marinetti developed a Futurist way of life, and a film was made, "Futurist Life," in which he and his accomplices demonstrated the correct way to perform all sorts of mundane tasks. In scene five Marinetti attempts to show how to "project oneself into new realms of artistic expression" by "extracting human expressions from objects" and by approaching "strangely assorted objects very carefully in order to see them in new lights" ("Episodes" 135-136). According to Giovanni Lista, "the Futurists increasingly assumed the role of renovators of the culture of the ephemeral and everyday, since they had entirely given up their aspiration to become revolutionary protagonists of the course of history" (154). The suggestion is that once the Futurists realised that their survival was dependent on a rapprochement with the Fascist government, and that the Fascists had a very definite approach towards bridging the gap between art and life, they gave up any attempt at a revolutionary socialisation of art and turned instead to an aestheticisation of everyday life. Russell Berman is not alone in his Benjaminian observation that "the fascist state and the war it incites are the legitimate heirs of the aestheticism of *l'art pour l'art*" since they

leave no room for revolutionary thought or action, only acceptance and submission to an untouchable, autonomous government (39). Berman writes: "Prohibiting criticism, right and justice, the fascist state and absolute art valorise submission and spectacle" (39). Marinetti now buried himself in establishing all life along the lines of art; this was all aspects of life for the sake of art, which was ultimately the culmination of *l'art pour l'art*.

Marinetti's intentions for Futurism by 1920 are a far cry from those expressed in his early manifestos. From wanting to abolish libraries and museums in order to bring art back onto the streets, Marinetti turned to an art that would enable its creators to "explode immense roses of exhilarating artistic power over Italy and the world, purifying and pacifying them" ("Beyond Communism" 155). Marinetti was perhaps not fixed in his ideas about the manner in which the interpenetration of art and life should take shape. The intention in 1909 was certainly to equate art and life by means of a rejection of the historic establishments, yet just how equal this equation would be remained to be seen. In the end it turned out to be a matter of art subsuming life or life subsuming art, depending on the particular political influence on Marinetti at the time. Such a conclusion somewhat contradicts Bürger's theory when it comes to its accommodation of Italian Futurism. However, it could be maintained that the initial intentions of Marinetti in 1909 had been to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, and the fact that his intentions altered latterly serves to explain the reservations with which Bürger includes Italian Futurism in his theory.

(xi) Conclusion

It would seem that Bürger is justified, to some extent, in including the Futurists in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and thereby claiming that they attempted to sublimate art into life, but he should equally be credited for the reservation with which he includes them. The "certain limitations" with which the Futurists can be included acknowledge the fact that at times they did indeed, albeit for reasons of pragmatism, attempt to subsume life in art, or to aestheticise life. Indeed, this is understandably the way in which many commentators are inclined to think. For, it would be just as valid to claim that in the end the Futurists, whilst they wanted an equation of art and life, had absolutely no intention of sublating art and relinquishing

its autonomy.

Timothy Mathews writes that although Futurism and Cubism have something in common when it comes to opposing the Impressionists' glorification of and subservience to nature, "the Futurist attempt to transform the praxis of art and the public expectations that surround it seeks to remove any barrier between the experience of a transformed world of mass technology and communication, and the development of a non-mimetic, simultaneous and dynamic art" (101). The Cubists, in contrast, more often than not, discover "experience and creativity in the *independence* of the work of art itself, in competition with the natural world" (102). Mathews describes the Futurist desire "to release consciousness from what it regards as the divisive categorisation imposed by analytical and discursive responses to the world" (110); the desire to minimise "the difference between conscious and unconscious, context and identity" (225). Mathews speculates as to whether there is a connection between these aesthetic notions and "the admiration of power and nationalism that makes possible the Futurist passage into Fascism" (110). In other words, is the desire to break down barriers, to the extent of giving art and the fictive as much credibility as external reality, inextricably linked to a love of power and nationalism? Marinetti had a strong nationalist leaning and a belief in an elitist society; did that mean he was inevitably drawn to integrate life into art as opposed to reintegrating art into the praxis of life? Many would believe so, since a state dominated by art and governed by an elite band of avant-garde artists could take Italy wherever it was felt she should go, and if external reality did not fit the picture, it could simply be sculpted into shape.

Benjamin believed that "the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life," or the effort to "render politics aesthetic" ("Work" 241). In other words, the prioritisation of art and the subsequent aestheticisation of life are inextricably linked with nationalist and elitist ideologies. As Russell Berman puts it, the strategy of projecting aesthetics onto a fragmented world would "ascribe to art a priority that it cannot legitimately claim for itself as one among several competing spheres of differentiated social activity. That priority would also necessarily have a repressive character, since it would entail an imposition of an aesthetic rationality onto the heterogeneous domains of politics, economics, religion,

etc” (“Aestheticisation” 33-34). The power of this repressive character is exactly what Fascism would be attempting to harness, since, according to Benjamin, “Fascism sees its salvation in giving [the] masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. . . . Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property” (“Work” 241). Benjamin goes on to speak of Fascism’s violation of the masses whom it “forces to their knees” with its *Führer* cult and prioritisation of art (241).

Thus, the belief in an elitist and nationalistic society and an admiration of power, such as Marinetti would not relinquish, logically led to the bestowing upon art and artists of a privileged role, in order that they might control the masses by diverting their energies towards creative expression, and their attention towards escapist propaganda. The masses would have their thirst quenched by “the inebriating alcohol of Art,” “a great, joyous, astonishing art,” that would finally “take the place of and eliminate the tiresome, vulgar and sanguinary alcohol of the proletariat’s Sunday taverns” (“Beyond Communism” 154, 155). This new “intellectual art-alcohol” would be extended to everyone, and would not breed “forgetfulness,” but would be “an alcohol of exalting optimism to deify the young, to centuple maturity and refresh old age” (156). Marinetti suggests “the expansion of our people’s faculty of dreaming, to educate it in a completely practical direction” so that the masses could have their demands for freedom met in their dreams, leaving those in power free to maintain the property structure of bourgeois capitalism (156). Once Marinetti’s desire for power and nationalism became so great that it led him, along with the likes of Balla and Severini, to elevate art in this manner, then Futurism began its inexorable passage into Fascism. Whether Marinetti was truly converted or whether he conceded to Fascist aesthetic practices for pragmatic reasons is open to debate. However, prior to the attempt to elevate art above life, it is quite possible to argue, as does Bürger, that Marinetti aimed for the more Communistic practice of subsuming art into life (Schulte-Sasse x).

Whilst the conclusion is that Bürger is justified in claiming that “with certain limitations” the Futurists attempted to socialise art via an abolition of the archaic institution of art, that is not to say that there is nothing to suggest that Scheunemann or Puchner are also justified in their arguments. With regard to Scheunemann’s

theory that the rise of the avant-garde was simply a reaction to advances in technology, it cannot be doubted that the Futurists, more than any other historical avant-garde movement, glorified and revelled in the age of the machine. Rather than seeing the machine as a threat to the future of art which had, through photography, perfected the art of mimesis, the Futurists adopted the machine into their practices and ideologies. In 1922, Enrico Prampolini, Iva Pannaggi, and Vinicio Paladini wrote the "Manifesto of Futurist Mechanical Art" which was later revised as "Mechanical Art: Futurist Manifesto." Here, the term "mechanical art" is described as "the machine adored and considered as the symbol, *source* and tutor of the new artistic sensibility" (my italics, 1). The manifesto states that "the new aesthetics of interpenetration, simultaneity and plastic dynamism" was "*born* of an ardent passion for the machine" (my italics, 1). Thus, it is indeed possible, in the manner of Scheunemann, to come to the conclusion that the avant-garde was primarily a reaction of the arts to the challenge presented to their techniques and existence by advances in technology. Such an interpretation is perfectly viable in the light of the theme, running through several of the Futurist manifestos, which amounts to adulation of the machine. As a further example, in "Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine," Marinetti wants to dispose of the classical "fusion of the two ideas Woman and Beauty" and to substitute it with the "new idea that runs through modern life: the idea of mechanical beauty" (90). The Futurists therefore "exalt love for the machine" and prepare themselves for "the imminent, inevitable identification of man with motor" (90, 91). Marinetti feels the Futurists must "admit that we look for the creation of a non-human type in whom moral suffering, goodness of heart, affection, and love, those sole corrosive poisons of inexhaustible vital energy, . . . will be abolished. . . . The nonhuman and mechanical being, constructed for omnipresent velocity, will be naturally cruel, omniscient and combative. . . . The *multiplied man* we dream of will never know the tragedy of old age!" (91-92). That is, if artists cannot surpass the machine they must join with it and praise it. This is Scheunemann's materialistic argument substantiated.

However, as previously examined, Berman suggests that a theory of the avant-garde must include both ideological and material definitions, and in "Machine Art: Futurist Manifesto" there are equal allusions to a Futurist ideology of the

aestheticisation of life. The Futurist vision of mechanical beauty and synthesis is “no fantasy,” Marinetti states, “but almost a reality that in a few years we will easily be able to control”; “Dream and Desire, which are empty words today, will master and reign over space and time” (91, 92). It is clear that, alongside evidence that supports the theory that the machine age was the catalyst for the upsurge of the avant-garde, there is also evidence to be found that supports an ideological explanation for the avant-garde.

Puchner’s theory that the existence of avant-garde manifestos is evidence enough of the avant-garde’s desire to integrate itself into politics is perhaps also best corroborated by an examination of the Futurist avant-garde intentions. As has been mentioned, “Italian modernists, much more than other European modernists, had a political vocation” (Gentile 31), and Marinetti found it simply impossible to work in a ivory tower with no political affiliations, as he discovered in 1920 after his temporary split with Mussolini. The Futurists produced political manifestos alongside artistic ones and went as far as to form a Futurist political party through which they had early hopes of becoming protagonists of both a cultural and political revolution. Futurism is a rare example of the successful coming together of an aesthetic and political avant-garde in practical terms. The Futurist manifestos can be taken as evidence of either a will to integrate Futurism into politics and life or latterly to elevate art to the standing of politics in society.

The conclusion for this chapter will have to be a heralding of Berman’s insight that a theory of the avant-garde must include both ideological and material definitions. It cannot be explained “solely in terms of the development of the institution of art, with no reference to broader social transformations” à la Bürger, or to some extent Puchner, nor can it be explained merely in terms of social or technological transformation à la Scheunemann.

In moving on to discuss the subsequent historical avant-garde movements, it should be noted that the manifestos of Futurism had a considerable impact on the avant-garde statements that followed them. This is something that Puchner terms the “Futurism Effect” (*Poetry* 3). Puchner refers to the Futurist manifestos as “Italy’s most aggressive export product because it seemed to introduce modes of advertisement and propaganda into the domain of literature” (3). The effect of the

inflammatory rhetoric of the Futurist manifestos on those of the Russian avant-garde, Dadaism and Surrealism, will need to be borne in mind in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 – RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE

Unlike German Expressionism, French Cubism or Italian Futurism, the avant-garde culture of Russia, both before and after the Revolution of 1917, is comparatively under-researched and unfamiliar to us. The lack of a convenient “ism” with which to label it indicates the lack of attention granted to this movement. Yet, the Russian avant-garde does not constitute a singular style since it encompasses a diverse range of movements. To chart a brief history, there is the very Russian folk-derived style of Neoprimitivism, followed by Russian interpretations of Cubism and Futurism, which then evolved into the uniquely Russian movements of Suprematism and Constructivism, finally culminating in Productivism. However, it should be remembered, in the words of Stephanie Barron, that “the development of the Russian avant-garde movement is not linear; it cannot be seen as a succession of styles or ideas flowing directly into one another. Rather, the multidimensionality of the participants and the chaos of the political environment contribute to a richly interwoven fabric that is designated ‘the Russian avant-garde’” (14-15). Barron defines the Russian avant-garde as “a movement characterised by an extraordinarily high level of experimentation and cross-fertilisation among all the arts” (12). As with Expressionism in Germany, many of the participants were politically active until the arrival of totalitarianism and the implementation of Realism, in this case, Socialist Realism under Stalin.

Along with Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism, Bürger is accused of neglecting the Russian avant-garde that operated prior to the October revolution of 1917 (Scheunemann 7). Thus, this chapter will focus on the Russian movements operating immediately before 1917, whilst not ignoring those Bürger does deal with, if only in order to confirm his interpretation. Bürger explained that although his theory applies primarily to Dadaism and early Surrealism, it applies “also and equally to the Russian avant-garde after the October revolution” (109, fn. 4). The Russian Revolution of 1917 saw the overthrow of the tsarist empire in February, and the subsequent overthrow, in October, of the moderate-socialist Provisional Government under Alexander Kerensky. This eventually resulted in the

establishment of Soviet power under the control of the Bolshevik party. The Bolshevik party was a faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, and was ultimately to become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Despite the “tyranny of distance” that limited the participation of Russian artists in the Western European avant-garde, Katerina Clark asserts that “most Russian avant-gardists shared a sense of common cause with [the European avant-gardists] and fought to maintain contact as much as possible” (29). This would suggest that there might be some substance to Bürger’s inclusion of the Russian avant-garde in his theory. However, Clark continues: “This sense of common cause does not suggest that a single motivation or set of beliefs could characterize so fiercely individualistic a group. On the contrary, for every general trend to be found among certain avant-gardists, the very opposite can be found among others” (29). Likewise, Boris Groys states: “In Russia, as elsewhere, the art of the classical avant-garde is too complex a phenomenon to be embraced by a single formula” (14). It will be interesting then, to see just where and to what extent Bürger’s formula can account for the Russian avant-garde, and to what degree the Russian avant-garde correlates with the Western European movements examined in previous chapters.

(i) Symbolism

To provide some background on the art world in Russia at the time, between the years of 1885 and 1910 Symbolism was the strongest movement in Russian literature and the visual arts. Symbolism was a move away from the naturalistic aims still retained by Impressionism. Symbolists were interested in portraying “primordial Ideas” as opposed to “scenes of nature,” “actions of human beings,” or “concrete phenomena” themselves as such (Moréas, “Symbolism” 1015). In the early phase of Symbolism, those such as Valery Briussov felt that art should be an end in itself and shared similar ideas to those of The World of Art association. The members of the “World of Art” postulated the doctrine of *l’art pour l’art* and took on the mission of restoring to Russia the culture which had been lost under the “Wanderers,” a colony of artists who repudiated the philosophy of art for art’s sake with the aim of “bringing art to the people” (Gray, Cam. 9). However, in the second wave of

Symbolism, Vyacheslav Ivanov, along with Alexander Blok and Andrei Bely, rejected a return to the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* proposed by Briussov, not feeling that art should again be “brought to the people” but that art was a means to reaching a higher truth, an instrument for the salvation of mankind. For Ivanov, the artist assumed a priest-like role whilst his work assumed a quasi-religious and mystical idealism much like that of the Blue Rose group. The Blue Rose group, essentially Symbolist in style, was active in Russia between 1907 and 1910, and is mentioned by Impressionist painter David Burliuk in his manifesto of 1908, “The Voice of an Impressionist: In Defence of Painting.” Here Burliuk writes:

Since the first exhibition of the World of Art, in 1899, there has been a new era. Artists look to the West. . . . The bast shoe of the Wanderers loses its apparent strength. . . . [It is] the Blue Rose, those who have grouped around *The Golden Fleece* [the Blue Rose journal] and the later Russian impressionists nurtured on Western models, those who trembled at the sight of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne (the synthesis of French trends in painting) – these are the hopes for the rebirth of Russian painting (11).

Burliuk clearly dismisses preceding doctrines of art: the *l'art pour l'art* doctrine of the World of Art, as well as the *l'art pour la vie* doctrine of the Wanderers.

Burliuk's support lies with the Blue Rose artists and the later Russian Impressionists (himself along with subsequent members of the Blue Rose group, Mikail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova) who were under the influence of the French *post-Impressionists* and their reaction against Impressionism's naturalistic aims. The Blue Rose artists, as second generation Symbolists, did not see the world as an alien environment to be retreated from, but rather contemplated the wonderful mystery of life, attempting to give life meaning through a quasi-religious art. Despite the fantastical themes of the Blue Rose artists' work, all of the painted subjects are essentially connected with life and many are painted from nature. Whilst the group were not heralding a doctrine of *l'art pour la vie*, they did not want an art that was out of touch with society. Indeed, certain members of the Blue Rose group, namely Larionov and Goncharova, along with other young painters such as David Burliuk, Marc Chagall and Kasimir Malevich went on to develop the style known as Neoprimitivism, which is where Burliuk's hopes for the “rebirth of Russian painting” are actualised and where this analysis of the Russian avant-garde really begins.

(ii) Neoprimitivism

Neoprimitivism blossomed in 1910 but as early as 1908 the search for the primitive, ancient heartbeat of Russia had begun. The painters in question looked to the simple life of the peasant in order to express the spirit of the countryside and the nation. Neoprimitivism gave these avant-garde artists a chance to experiment whilst maintaining a specifically Russian identity. However, by 1910 the experimentation of Larionov and his “Russian” followers became too extreme for certain members of the group who wanted to maintain the dignity of their exhibition group, the Knave of Diamonds, under the leadership of the more conservative painter Aristarkh Lentulov. Lentulov had a strong orientation towards French painting and he and his followers adopted the analytical method of Cubism. Eventually a split was provoked when one of Larionov’s followers attached a paintbrush to a donkey’s tail and submitted the resulting canvas to the Paris Salon des Indépendents. In due course Larionov and his “primitive” followers formed their own exhibition group, aptly named “The Donkey’s Tail.” Larionov aspired to a crude, primitive art that did not have to be dominated by the demands of representation.

It was between the years of 1910, when Neoprimitivism bloomed, and 1917, when the Bolshevik revolution took place, that the avant-garde in St. Petersburg and Moscow found itself in ferment. As David Elliott writes of this period, “in manifestos, cabarets, groups and counter-groups, young artists struggled to express a new energy and vitality against the darkening twilight of the decaying Empire” (12-13). Quite late into the life of the movement, in 1913, Aleksandr Shevchenko, painter and member of The Donkey’s Tail, wrote the only official declaration of the Neoprimitivists entitled “Neoprimitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements.” Whilst Shevchenko’s work had a definite nationalistic bias, and the manifesto’s comparatively late date means there is evidence of a Futurist influence in the form of a machine aesthetic, it can still serve to shed some light on the intentions of the movement as a whole.

Shevchenko explains that he and the Neoprimitivists are “striving to seek new paths for our art, but we do not reject the old completely, and of its previous forms we recognise above all – the primitive, the magic fable of the old East. [. . .] For the point of departure in our art we take the *lubok*, the primitive art form, the icon, since

we find in them the most acute, most direct perception of life – and a purely painterly one at that” (45-46). On the subject of the autonomy of art, Shevchenko writes: “The words *Art*, i.e., invention, and *nature*, i.e., reality, are at a crossroads called the “Creative Will of the Artist,” and diverge along different paths; that is why we do not pursue a naturalistic resemblance to nature in our pictures” (45). So the new paths that the Neoprimitivists seek for their art are ones that diverge from the path of Nature and material reality. For the Neoprimitivists “painting is self-sufficient. [. . .] Art is for itself and not for the execution of a subject” (46). And yet, nature is not rejected completely, as Shevchenko writes, “the word *neoprimitivism* on the one hand testifies to our point of departure, and on the other – with its prefix, *neo* – reminds us also of its involvement in the painterly traditions of our age” (47). But Shevchenko is quick to point out that “the primitive art form, like nature, [cannot] restrict our freedom. We are merely fascinated by its simplicity, its harmony of style, and its direct, artistically true perceptiveness of life”; and again: “Nature is the raw material that merely excites in our soul this or that emotion that we experience when we fulfil our conception of the picture’s surface” (45). Whilst the Neoprimitivists felt it was not “necessary to copy nature and life,” they felt it was nevertheless “necessary to observe and study them unceasingly,” that whilst art was not to be created “directly from nature,” it was to be “guided by impression” (46). Indeed Shevchenko goes so far as to say that he and the Neoprimitivists even tolerate work executed directly from nature “so long as it is based on the judicious will of the artist-creator and not on servile submission to nature,” that “our art, although executed from nature, will, as it were, serve us as a fulcrum” (46). In other words, art is perceived by the Neoprimitivists as a hinge between the world of nature and the world of spirit, a “prism” through which nature is studied, distorted, and converted into the experience of the artist, for “art is the artist’s experiences, his spiritual life” (53). Indeed, a “fulcrum” can also be defined figuratively as “an agent through which vital powers are exercised” (“fulcrum”).

Interpreted in this way, it is almost as though Neoprimitivist art is a medium enabling access to the realm of the spiritual which has hitherto been barred, a means to a higher, extra-material end. So, although the Neoprimitivists believe very definitely that “Art is for Art’s sake,” a “useless” medium that “must not serve any or

anyone's ideas apart from its own," they believe that it is "at the same time capable of exciting sensations of the highest order in those people to whose class the artist himself belongs" (52-53). The idea is that in demanding a purely painterly character of art, the Neoprimitivists can, for example, "change the colour of objects in order to manifest their spiritual essence; . . . a colour would be employed that had a more profound psychological effect" (52). The suggestion is that in calling for *l'art pour l'art* the Neoprimitivists were providing what they saw as a means of transportation from the world of nature to the world of spirit, from the material world to the world of "eternal life, eternal youth and eternal self-perfection" (54). In this sense the Neoprimitivists were sympathetic to the Symbolists but thought that their ideology should be expressed purely through *l'art pour l'art* and not through any "tawdry cabalism" (52). The implication is that the Neoprimitivists were in favour of a more subtle, less overt spirituality and abstraction.

Whilst Symbolism and Neoprimitivism were both reactions against naturalism, the Neoprimitivists did not react against Realism in the same way as the Symbolists. The Neoprimitivists, as the Cubists Metinger and Gleizes did, tried to maintain a claim to Realism, stating that the depiction of their objects "is concrete but not naturalistic" and that "Realism consists of a conscious attitude to life and its understanding; naturalism consists of an unconscious, sometimes even senseless, contemplation of nature and copying of objects" (50). Finally they believed that "Realism is in the essence of objects," whilst "Naturalism in painting is the outward imitation of their form" (50). Shevchenko, it must be noted, does appear to engage in a rhetorical manipulation of the concepts behind realism and naturalism. The term "Realism," until the end of the nineteenth century, generally connoted naturalism or representational art. However, the term came to be used in the study of twentieth-century art in a "confusing variety of combination forms"; it came to be used to describe not only representational art, but equally "abstract art that sees reality as inner truth and opposes 'mere appearances'" ("Realism"). Thus, Shevchenko, if a little advanced, was not totally unjustified in his manipulation of the term.

Shevchenko is similarly sympathetic to the Impressionists, several of whom graduated to Neoprimitivism. Shevchenko describes Impressionism as the first step along the way to freedom from the direct representation of nature. Rather, the

artist's hand is to be guided by an "impression" of nature which, according to Shevchenko, "provides a broader field for displaying one's own world view" (46). In Shevchenko's mind Impressionism is to be valued up until the point when it shows signs that it does not properly comprehend the principles of pure painting and begins to dilute art with reflections of nature. Again, however, Shevchenko's interpretation of Impressionism is not totally objective and must be taken, in its context. It was customary in manifesto-writing to use previous "isms" as a support against which to construct a contrasting aesthetic theory.

Neoprimativists, whilst acknowledging that the roots of their work are in nature, since "there are, and can be, no phenomena that are born out of nothing," and that their school takes "its genesis from the primitive," state that they are "developing within contemporaneity" (48). For Shevchenko, to develop along the lines of the modern art scene meant to shun the "old academy" and follow the trend of *l'art pour l'art*, since the academy "forgets that subject is not the aim but merely a most significant means, and that painting consists only of itself" (47).

Ultimately, whilst shunning the naturalism of the academy, Neoprimativism upholds art's autonomous status, calling for an accentuation of *l'art pour l'art* which distinguishes art from life and nature. Having divorced itself from all representation of the material world, art becomes an end in itself. Once art freed itself from extra-aesthetic purpose and all duty of imitation, as David Burliuk observes, it "found within itself endless horizons and aspirations," and these aspirations are inevitably of a "spiritual" nature since "artists of today are the prophetic eyes of mankind" ("Cubism" 71).

Whilst the ideology of Neoprimativism is clearly not in line with Bürger's theory that the avant-garde intended to reintegrate art into life, it should also be mentioned that the Neoprimativists had a very different understanding of "life" from Bürger. Whereas for Bürger "life" implied the Marxist "praxis of life" in the form of society and politics, for the Neoprimativists it implied "nature" itself, which they felt their art was indebted to. Furthermore, the synthesis of art that Bürger feels the avant-garde strived for was a Hegelian, dialectical one that was not by any means fixed or irreversible. For the Neoprimativists, however, the synthesis that they backed away from was understood more as a "binary" or structural one which would

have been eternal.¹² Bürger was working with a Marxist conception of art and life as dialectical rather than fixed opposites. With the Hegelian synthesis, art would continue to exist within life, albeit in a transfigured form, whereas with the binary synthesis, art would be absorbed into life and irreversibly negated there. Thus, it is possibly only the latter understanding of synthesis that the Neoprimitivists are objecting to – a dilution of art in nature to the point of becoming indistinguishable from it. The distinction between Hegel's dialectical synthesis which was adopted by the Marxists, and the binary synthesis of Weimar Classicism, is reflected in Lukács' distinction between the narrative and the descriptive style in his essay, "Narration vs. Description: A Contribution to the Discussion on Naturalism and Formalism," 1936. To use Lukács' terms, a "narrative" synthesis would portray a process, a struggle and convergence of opposing forces; a "descriptive" synthesis would simply display a result.

(iii) French inspired Cubism

By 1912, David Burliuk, as a fully-fledged Neoprimitivist and member of the more conservative Knave of Diamonds, was now very much under the influence of French Cubism. In his essay entitled "Cubism (Surface-Plane)" Burliuk cites Cubism as the catalyst for the "New Painting" of the twentieth century. Burliuk distinguishes this New Painting from Old Painting, stating that with pre-twentieth-century art it was the means to an end, whereas, "today it has become the end"; he continues: "Painting has begun to pursue only Painterly objectives. It has begun to live for itself" (70). In pursuing these purely painterly objectives, the artist must take a new standpoint "vis-à-vis Nature" (73). Now the artist must not concern himself with the subject of a painting, with the details of landscapes or faces, which are just circumstantial, rather, he must have eyes only for lines, surfaces, colours and textures. For the artist of a purely painterly understanding there exist no mountains, trees or sky, only the essence of their surface. It seems that Burliuk ultimately implies that the difference between Old and New Painting can best be described as an increased "interest in the Spiritual" which is best expressed through an art of

¹² For a more extensive explanation of "binary synthesis" see "Binary synthesis: Goethe's aesthetic intuition in literature and science" (Stephenson 579).

abstraction (70).

In the same year, in a speech on “Cubism” at the Knave of Diamonds debate, Natalya Goncharova of the Donkey’s Tail clearly voiced her disagreement with Burliuk’s views on the subject. Goncharova condemns Burliuk and the Knave of Diamonds for an interpretation of Cubism that has “replaced creative activity with theorising” (78). Burliuk argues that “not to be a theoretician of painting means to reject an understanding of it. [. . .] What is important is not the *what*, but the *how*, i.e., which principles, which objectives, guided the artist’s creation of this or that work” (75); Goncharova maintains that “at all times it has mattered and will matter what the artist depicts, although at the same time it is extremely important *how* he embodies his conception” (78). Under the influence of Cubism, the Knave of Diamonds, the more academic group of Neoprimitivists, moved “from decorativeness and polychromy toward a more acute analysis of form and a more architectonic composition” (Bowlt xxviii). Goncharova and the Donkey’s Tail were not as interested in following Western models and promoted a more dynamic Russian art that was not so stifled by theory, analysis and correct technique, although they went on to come heavily under the influence of Futurism.

Essentially both groups of Neoprimitivists were working towards *l’art pour l’art*, an art that was not dominated by the demands of representation, but at the same time neither group ever resorted to complete abstraction. Even the Knave of Diamonds “never lost contact with the world of objects”, albeit that objects were considered only circumstantial in their paintings; they always “remained at a stage before non-representation” (Bowlt xxviii). It was important for the Neoprimitivists to steer clear, as the French Cubists did, of the Symbolist trap of excessive mysticism and abstraction which only led to solipsistic isolation and an unproductive dismissal of external reality (Gray, Chris. 20). Such art proved wholly barren and purposeless and could not survive for long before there were cries for the expression of a tangible and visible reality using explicit concrete imagery. Those movements who came after Symbolism came to see themselves in dialectical opposition to the movement, using it as a foundation against which to set their own aesthetic theory.

(iv) Italian inspired Futurism

By 1913, the members of the Donkey's Tail were under the influence of Italian Futurism, Larionov amongst them. Marinetti's "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" had been published in the Russian press almost immediately after its appearance in the Parisian press in 1909. It was in 1913 that Larionov, in conjunction with Ilya Zdanevich, wrote the manifesto briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, "Why We Paint Ourselves: A Futurist Manifesto." Here Larionov is expressly concerned with reconnecting art to everyday life, where the body of the artist becomes the point of connection between art and life. Larionov writes: "We have joined art to life. After the long isolation of artists we have loudly summoned life and life has invaded art, it is time for art to invade life. The painting of our faces is the beginning of the invasion" (81). So, now that a work of art has become a living organism in its own right, Larionov feels it is time to take art out onto the streets. It seems that for the first time in this analysis of the Russian avant-garde it is necessary to consider that practising abstraction in art and calling for the reintegration of art into the praxis of life are not mutually exclusive; this is exemplified in Mark Cheetham's book, *Abstract Art against Autonomy*, which aims to give a revised account of abstract art, by overturning the once assumed goal of aesthetic autonomy. Whilst Cheetham's account is only applied to abstraction since the decline of the formalist concepts in the 1960s, his observations seem just as relevant to parts of the Russian avant-garde in the early twentieth century. Cheetham even cites the work of Kasimir Malevich as a paradigm for his theory. Larionov went on to form Rayonism, a pioneer "abstract" school of painting which led to Kasimir Malevich's founding of Suprematism, the "first systematic school of abstract painting in the modern movement" (Gray, Cam. 141). Malevich had submitted works to the Donkey's Tail Exhibition in March 1912 and spoke of his co-operation with Goncharova at this time: "Goncharova and I worked more on the peasant level. Every work of ours had a content which, although expressed in primitive form, revealed a social concern. This was the basic difference between us and the 'Knave of Diamonds' group which was working in the line of Cézanne" (from Malevich's unpublished biography qtd. in Gray, Cam. 134-135). Larionov explains that he and his followers "do not aspire to a single form of aesthetics," and that, for them, "art is

not only a monarch but also a newsman and a decorator” (81). In other words, whilst painting is abstract and self-sufficient, it must choose not to be autonomous and to communicate with society in order to “decorate life and preach,” “to rearrange life and to bear man’s soul to the upper reaches of reality” (81, 83). Malevich was in fact a devout Christian and felt that by abandoning depiction of the external world a deeper level of meaning could be reached.

In Larionov’s subsequent manifesto, “Rayonists and Futurists: A Manifesto,” he calls for “Art for life and even more – life for art!” in the same breath as calling for the truly abstract painting that is “free from concrete forms, existing and developing according to painterly laws” (89-90). This, for Larionov, is the “true liberation of painting and its life in accordance with only its own laws, a self-sufficient painting, with its own forms, colour and timbre” (91). As Larionov reaffirms in “Rayonist Painting,” whilst painting is liberated from the imitation of nature, “Rayonism erases the barriers that exist between the picture’s surface and nature” (99). This seems extremely paradoxical, however, unlike in his first Futurist manifesto, “Why we paint ourselves,” Larionov is now focusing on the abstract nature of painting rather than on its integration into life, and believes that “we don’t need popularisation – our art will, in any case, take its full place in life – that’s a matter of time. [. . .] We do not demand public attention and ask that it not be demanded from us” (“Rayonists” 88, 90). Larionov feels that the Rayonist painter “attains the pinnacle of painting for painting’s sake” and that now painting is to be regarded as “an end in itself and no longer as a means of expression” (“Pictorial Rayonism” 101). Larionov takes for granted that this art will integrate itself into life by its very nature. In other words, Larionov believed it was by ceasing to reproduce nature and taking on an organic life of its own that art would in fact become a part of nature. Thus, there is no paradox to be found in Larionov’s theory; though it may still be seen to be anti-dialectical, covering all the angles whilst leaving no ground for an antithesis. The idea is much like Mondrian’s theory of Neo-plasticism, the style of the Dutch *De Stijl* group to be examined in the next chapter, which claimed that once art had been totally reduced to its specific elements, that is, once it achieved a state of pure abstraction, it would be readily dissipated into everyday life. Indeed, Mark Cheetham, in *Abstract Art against Autonomy*, emphasises the

“performative and sometimes optimistically pedagogical aspects of abstraction, a symptom that binds the form to contemporary realities” (2), and identifies Malevich’s medical model of the infectious “additional element” as a paradigm for such a take on abstraction (“Diagrams” 38). Ultimately, Cheetham sees Malevich’s approach as exemplifying “the purposeful integration of abstraction with surrounding aesthetic and social discourses; in other words, its struggle ‘against autonomy’” (5). Malevich in fact saw the ultimate abstraction or “purity” of art in its self-transcendence. Once art achieved a purified state it would inevitably become “infected” with additional elements from society and thereby sublated into life. In this context, Larionov’s manifestos could be used to support Martin Puchner’s theory that their very existence is evidence of an avant-gardist attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life (“Screeching” 116). The genre of the manifesto could have been assumed by the Russian Futurists and Rayonists as a method of intervening against the presumed autonomous status of their abstract art. Puchner felt the genre of the art manifesto bridged the gap between art and the praxis of life (117).

Larionov and Malevich did not share their approach with the Italian Futurists, however, Marinetti wishing to prevent art from becoming “too abstract or artistic” (“Geometric” 158). Indeed, after his visit to Russia in 1914, Marinetti is reported to have said: “The Russians are false Futurists, who distort the true meaning of the great religion for the renewal of the world by means of Futurism” (qtd. in Gray, Cam. 94). Whilst the Russian Futurist movement was inspired by Italian Futurism, it very much had its own interpretation of the term, and, as Camilla Gray states, “‘Cubo-Futurism’ is a happier term to describe this Russian movement” (94). Unlike the Italian Futurists, the Russian Futurists saw no need to bring down the institution of art in the process of bridging the gap between art and life. The aggressive rhetoric of the Italian Futurist manifestos, muted in these Russian manifestos, displays the greater harnessing of political tactics. Furthermore, the “quasi-poetic construct” of some of the Italian Futurist manifestos, which led Marjorie Perloff to conceive of them as art forms in their own right (82), is not to be found in the manifestos of the Russian Futurists.

(v) Suprematism

In 1915, following on from Larionov, Malevich wrote his book entitled "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism." The first six paragraphs were virtually the same as the statement Malevich issued at the "Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures 0.10." The exhibition was the first public showing of Suprematist works and the statement acted much like a manifesto for the new movement. The first few lines of "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism" call for "purely painterly" works of art that shun the academy and no longer reproduce "little nooks of nature" (118). The aim of Suprematism, claims Malevich, is destruction of the "rubbishy slough of academic art" and a move towards "creation as an end in itself and toward domination over the forms of nature" (119). This was the quintessence of art for art's sake. In his book Malevich goes on to elaborate on the ideology of the new movement and charts its development through Cubism and Futurism to what it has become today. Malevich explains that the art of the academy, belonging to the ages of the Renaissance and Greece, is an art which aims at an accurate reproduction of nature, and as a result is never a pure act of creation, since "the artist can be a creator only when the forms in his picture have nothing in common with nature" (122). As Malevich writes, "between the art of creating and the art of repeating there is a great difference," since "to create means to live," whereas, to repeat a living form of nature is to transmit "its corpse in the picture" (122-123). The painting of yesteryear "was the aesthetic side of the object. But it was never an independent end in itself," a "spontaneous creation" with no "utilitarian purpose" (124). Malevich goes on to claim that the art of today creates painterly forms as ends in themselves and that "such forms will not be repetitions of living things in life but will themselves be a living thing" (129). This is what Malevich refers to as "the new painterly realism" and it is in this way rather than through the traditional realism of objects, "of mountains, sky, water," that art, in the age of Suprematism, will become integrated into life just like all living forms of nature (133). Malevich wanted to see an end to art as an institution, believing that "there are no special rights and liberties for art, religion or civil life" ("Question" 174).

This simultaneous support for *l'art pour l'art* and *l'art pour la vie* sets Suprematism, like Russian Futurism, astride Bürger's conventional division of

modernism and the avant-garde. Modernists and Aestheticists very much saw art as an end in itself existing in a segregated, independent and impenetrable realm with no links to the external world of bourgeois means-ends rationality and market values (Bürger 49). The avant-garde, on the other hand, was all for turning its back on the *l'art pour l'art* of the academy and making art not a means to an end, but an indistinguishable part of social and political life; a new life praxis would be formed "from a basis in art" (Bürger 49). Suprematists, rather awkwardly for Bürger's theory, but in accordance with Cheetham's, saw art as an end in itself that would thereby in fact evade the academy and become a part of life. So, Suprematism fits into Bürger's theory insofar as it aims to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, but its initial aim was not to put an end to the institution of art via a "social" art; this outcome was rather considered an inevitable by-product of the aim to achieve a purely non-functional, painterly, abstract art.

According to Malevich, neither Cubism nor Futurism achieved their goal of producing purely painterly plasticity and, despite their efforts of "dissonance" and "dynamism" respectively, still remained pinned down by the object, by the forms of nature. The claim is that the "nonobjective creation" of Suprematism, on the other hand, reached for total abstraction, finally relinquished reiteration of the object, and thus succeeded in infusing art with a life of its own. The Futurists, according to Malevich, may have called out to life and "managed to make a picture of the [dynamic] new life, . . . but that is all" (126), for the Futurists' communication with life remained a cry from within the walls of the academy of objectivism. As Malevich wrote, "in order to transmit the movement of modern life, one must operate with its forms. Which made it more complicated for the art of painting to reach its goal" (127).

In 1919 Malevich wrote a piece on Suprematism for the catalogue of the Tenth State Exhibition. The exhibition was held in Moscow and subtitled *Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism*. By this time the October Revolution of 1917 had brought the Bolsheviks to power and Russia was in a process of change, shedding its bourgeois structures in industry, education, art and the economy, and building the new Soviet utopia. One would expect that the changed political and ideological conditions might have affected Malevich's aesthetic approach, but, at this

stage, he was still exclaiming that “all colourations of utilitarian purpose are insignificant” (“Suprematism” 144). Malevich exhibited his *White on White* paintings, writing that he had “breached the blue lampshade of colour limitations and passed into the white beyond . . . Sail on! The white, free depths, eternity, is before you” (145). Malevich approached Suprematism as a metaphysical idealist, believing that art was a transcendent activity which had the potential to embody the absolute, a fourth dimension or even life beyond death: “I have transformed myself in the zero of form and through zero have reached creation, that is, suprematism, the new painterly realism” (“From Cubism” 133).

At the Tenth State Exhibition, however, it became clear that there were now conflicting points of view between the older and younger artists of the avant-garde. Aleksandr Rodchenko, thirteen years Malevich’s junior, exhibited in 1919, and his piece for the exhibition catalogue, “Rodchenko’s System,” highlighted his distance from Malevich’s conception of Suprematism. Rodchenko was very much an admirer of the materialist artist Vladimir Tatlin and began to work against the idealism of Malevich. Rodchenko wanted to transcend all styles, rhetorically positioning himself apart from all previous movements: “the downfall of all the “isms” of painting marked the beginning of my ascent” (149). For Rodchenko, “the motive power is not synthesis but invention (analysis)” (150). In other words, Rodchenko, in placing emphasis on analysis rather than synthesis, was demonstrating a fundamental deviation from the abductive idealism of Malevich’s approach, which posited an additional fourth dimension, towards a more deductive materialism. The linear style of the paintings of Rodchenko and most other exhibitors also served to demonstrate a predominant concern with construction as opposed to any form of Supreme Being or spiritualism.

One artist inspired by the Third State Exhibition was El Lissitzky, a close contact of Malevich’s, whose essay of 1920, “Suprematism in World Reconstruction” was intended to act as a retrospective commentary on Malevich’s original formulation of Suprematism. For Lissitzky himself, the discipline of architecture presented itself as a vehicle for the transference of basic Suprematist schemes into life itself. Along with the linear and architectonic style of the work of the other exhibitors, Lissitzky’s plans for architecture were part of a general

endeavour, post-1917, to project art into life, to give painting a constructive dimension. As Ilya Ehrenburg put it, "the aim of the new art is to fuse with life" (qtd. in Bowlt 152).

Even Malevich had begun to support this trend, having given up abstract painting after his composition of *White on White*, c. 1918, feeling he could take his concept of Suprematism no further. Malevich turned to teaching and making three-dimensional models that supported the new concept of a constructive art. In 1919 Malevich accepted an invitation to start teaching at the Vitebsk art school where he soon began to exert a powerful influence over Lissitzky. In the Free Art Workshops Malevich gathered many young and progressive supporters whom he provided with the slogan "Integrate Suprematism into Life" (qtd. in Elliott 15).

In his piece of 1920, "Suprematism in World Construction," Lissitzky writes that with Suprematism the picture "started to gain stature as a new world of reality" and for the first time the artist was freed from his obligations as a "moralist as a story-teller or as a court jester, so that he could follow unhindered his creative bent and tread the road that leads to construction" (153). Lissitzky feels that Suprematism wipes out the notion of "painting for painting's sake" because it ventures "far beyond the frontiers of painting" into the realm of contre-reliefs and architectonic designs (155). These works had a life of their own beyond that of the artistic realm. Lissitzky then implies that Malevich's original notion of Suprematism was only the first phase of the movement which has since "plunged . . . into irrelevancy" and extinguished itself there, since it did not step out "beyond the confines of the picture" and develop into a "world system" (157). Lissitzky explains that the second, "much-improved" phase of the movement has already moved towards rendering all men creators and eradicating the distinction between "artists and non-artists," the boundaries of "the useful and the useless" piece of work (157-158). Lissitzky believes that "artistic" work must lose its label and be "accepted as one of the functions of the living human organism in the same way as the beating of the heart or the activity of the nerve centres so that it will be afforded the same protection" (158). Those involved in creative activity must be "liberated" in order for Suprematism to embrace the "totality of all life's phenomena" and thereby "make the world into a true model of perfection" (158). Lissitzky felt that it was Malevich who led the way

along this path to perfection and that artists should take their lead from him. The concept of Suprematism advanced by Lissitzky is far wider than that originally formulated by Malevich, but such ideas, revolving around the universal application of Suprematism, were actually also developed by Malevich in his "On New Systems in Art," which he wrote at Vitebsk in 1919. Malevich writes: "In following the old aesthetic action, art takes no part in the building of the modern world" (87). In contrast, in following the new aesthetic action, art grows "together with the stem of an organism, for it is art's concern to decorate the stem, to lend it form, to take part in its purpose and function" (87). The belief is that "a new art, medium and experience are necessary for every epoch," and thus, "whatever takes shape, it must take shape within the unity of the universal modern movement" (89, 88). The philosophy of the modern movement lies in the "new economic order" that is being brought about which will "smooth the ruts in our creative brain," and this is the philosophy that Malevich feels creativity must follow (117). Thus Suprematism, Malevich claims, strives to compose its expression "not of *aesthetic*, but of *economic necessity*" (84), moving away from a philosophy of *l'art pour l'art* towards one of art for the sake of the universal modern movement.

Lissitzky almost seems to view Suprematism as a new all-encompassing world religion, one that will supersede even that of Communism. He concludes with the summary: "After the Old Testament there came the New – After the New came the Communist – And after the Communist there follows finally the Testament of Suprematism" (158). Lissitzky's paintings of this period were given the generic title of *Prouns*, meaning "projects for the affirmation of the new" (Elliott 15), and were supposed to act as the intermediary point between painting and architecture, between two- and three-dimensional forms. They appear as architectonic plans for three-dimensional constructions. According to Lissitzky they were intended as plans "for the new Communist cities of the future" (Elliott 15). Malevich's architectural schemes were not to appear until some years later, but he had already, by this time, begun to experiment with three-dimensional forms. Malevich then developed these forms into a cosmic architecture which he felt could both serve and decorate the new Communist order. At Vitebsk, in 1919, Lissitzky took his lead.

(vi) Constructivism

In his mature work Lissitzky achieved a fusion of the Suprematism of Malevich and the movement which came to be known as Constructivism. The avant-garde artist admired by Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, as leader of this movement, was Malevich's materialist counterpart. Tatlin's approach was in stark contrast to Malevich's metaphysical one, and was largely concerned with volume rather than plane, with three dimensions as opposed to two or the mystical "four" claimed by Malevich. Tatlin demanded that art be devoid of not only concrete, but also spiritual, contemplative content, proclaiming the work of art to be wholly autonomous with no mimetic relationship to external reality. Tatlin's rejection of traditional art led him to experiment with non-art materials, using them in their original forms and colours. Tatlin started off, in about 1914, creating relief paintings in which he attached objects such as pieces of leather and metal onto a background of wood, for example, which acted as his frame and canvas. Tatlin showed these reliefs at the 1915 exhibition *Tramway V*, but by December of that year he had already graduated to creating what he called "counter-relief" constructions and these were displayed at the *0.10* exhibition in Petrograd where he and Malevich publicly unveiled the work of their new movements and together stressed their break with past traditions. These counter-reliefs were similar to his relief paintings but for the fact that they did away with the supporting base that acted as the picture frame and canvas, and instead of being hung on a wall were suspended from it usually across the corner of a room in attempt to emulate, or rather create, an environmental process. Tatlin's work is described as "constructed," unlike traditional sculpture, and seemed to move towards an "anti-art" conception of aesthetics (Barron, "Russian" 15). Groys writes: "The constructivists themselves regarded their constructions not as self-sufficient works of art, but as models of a new world" (22). Such a conception was in direct contrast to Malevich's notion that art should take the path towards the autonomy of *l'art pour l'art*. From the *1.10* exhibition onwards the doctrinal dispute between Tatlin and Malevich would become amplified. Though both artists shared a belief in the coming political revolution and wanted to create a revised notion of art that would contribute to the new society by supporting the revolutionary aim to "change man,"

they had very different ideas as to how to go about this.

After the revolution, in a piece of 1920 entitled "The Work Ahead of Us," Tatlin provided a commentary on his model of the Monument to the Third International Communist conference. The project of Tatlin's Monument or Tower was worked on by several artists and architects, among whom Tevel Shapiro, Iosif Meerson, and P. Vinogradov also co-signed "The Work Ahead of Us." The aim of the Tower was to synthesise the principles of architecture, sculpture and painting into one organic structure. As Tatlin writes, "the foundation on which our work in plastic art – our craft – rested was not homogeneous, and every connection between painting, sculpture and architecture had been lost" (206). Tatlin explains that from as early as 1914 when he started creating his relief paintings he had accepted "materials, volume and construction" as his foundations (206). Once this synthesis was reflected in the social aspect in 1917 it became possible for Tatlin to merge "purely artistic forms with utilitarian intentions" (206). Tatlin then cites his project for the Monument to the Third International as an example of this bringing together, in which the materials, traditionally belonging to the architectural discipline, were introduced to the artistic one resulting in a work of sculpture with a utilitarian intention (office accommodation for the revolutionary government). On production of the model for the Monument, Tatlin left behind the purist art of his reliefs and counter-reliefs and crossed over into the area of productional design i.e. the practical application of his ideas to areas of life such as fashion, carpentry and domestic appliances. Post-revolution, Tatlin became certain that art must be ultimately utilitarian and functional. The last lines of the piece certainly suggest such a conviction, as Tatlin claims that models such as that for the Monument "stimulate us to inventions in our work of creating a new world," and "call upon the producers to exercise control over the forms encountered in our new everyday life" (206).

In his "Art into Technology" essay of 1932, Tatlin championed the creation of the "synthetic object necessary in life itself" (310). Tatlin didn't simply believe that technology should be mechanically applied to art, but that an "organic connection" of materials with art must be realised, resulting in a form "necessary to life itself" (310). Tatlin proceeded from material constructions of the simplest forms, which included such objects of everyday life as furniture and clothes, to more

complicated ones such as the architectural construction in honour of Comintern: the Monument to the Third International. Tatlin called for the birth of “new cultural institutions for our everyday life,” in which the “working masses will live, think and reveal their talents” (311).

In 1920 the Institute of Artistic Culture, or Inkhuk, had been set up in Russia in order to implement and manage a programme of experimental art for post-revolutionary Russia. An art was required that would contribute directly to a Communist Utopia. By the end of 1921 two sections had been formed, one in Petrograd under Tatlin and the other in Vitebsk under Malevich. There were two schools of thought within Inkhuk; one, heralded by Malevich, sought to implement “laboratory art” which had a social end in view but refused to fully dispense with the traditional materials of paint and canvas; the other, trumpeted by Tatlin, sought to implement “production art” which aimed to eradicate the distinction between artist and engineer and instate designers for machine production. The production group was far more influential, contributing to the rise of Constructivism in its “Productivist” form. In 1919, when Suprematism had been reprimanded for not providing art for the proletariat, Malevich appeared to move towards Tatlin’s way of thinking, creating three-dimensional models that were to further the Constructivist cause. By 1921, Malevich was fully committed to industrial design, perhaps seeing few other options for a revolutionary and utopian art in such a proletarian-orientated political structure.

In the same year, the exhibition $5 \times 5 = 25$ was held in Moscow by five Constructivist artists who each contributed five works of art. The exhibition was significant in that it represented the official and public renouncing of *l’art pour l’art* and the move from traditional art to industrial design, a utilitarian art that was close to anti-art. Although this new art exemplifies a reintegration of art into the praxis of life, it is the type of “means-ends” reintegration that Bürger claims the avant-garde tried to steer clear of (49). In the words of Aaron Scharf:

Constructivism was neither meant to be an abstract style in art nor even an art, per se. At its core, it was first and foremost the expression of a deeply motivated conviction that that artist could contribute to enhance the physical and intellectual needs of the whole of society by entering directly into a rapport with machine production, with architectural engineering and with the graphic and photographic

means of communication. To meet the material needs, to express the aspirations, to organize and systematize the feelings of the revolutionary proletariat – that was their aim: . . . the socialization of art (160-161).

Despite Malevich's resignation to industrial design, he continued to paint non-utilitarian works behind closed doors. Productivism was simply too extreme for those such as Malevich who still believed in an art independent from means-ends rationality, and felt that art could induce a "change in man" by other means than surrendering its autonomous status, that it could contribute to society and the evolution of man by being "spiritually uplifting." Malevich was not alone in this belief and by the mid-1920s many artists who steadfastly refused to accept their role as industrial designers, to the exclusion of traditional art, felt forced to leave Russia. Among those also campaigning so fervently for the autonomy of art were Constructivist artists Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner.

(vii) Gabo and Pevsner

In August 1920 Gabo and Pevsner published a manifesto to accompany an open-air exhibition of their work. The work was really a belated espousal of Constructivist ideas that had grown up long before 1920. "The Realistic Manifesto" was concerned with espousing the essence of reality as opposed to traditional, representational realism. Gabo and Pevsner were Constructivists in so far as they wanted to reflect technology in their work, and yet they did not believe art had to serve an obvious and overt social purpose. The two artists made use of industrial material such as plastic and glass in their abstract sculptural constructions, but they felt that art could provide a subtle contribution to society by means of lifting the spirit of its audience without being pressed into utilitarian Productivism. Interest still remained for *veshch* (the object as such), for the counter-relief as an end point.

Gabo and Pevsner write that "neither Futurism nor Cubism has brought us what our time has expected of them" since, "no new artistic system will withstand the pressure of a growing new culture until the very foundation of Art will be erected on the real laws of Life" (210). The artists then clarify their definition of the "laws of life": "Space and time are the only forms on which life is built and hence art must be constructed"; therefore, "*the realisation of our perceptions of the world in the*

forms of space and time is the only aim of our pictorial and plastic art" (210). The temporal element was introduced into sculpture "by means of mobile constructions," an idea first conceived by Futurist Boccioni and realised by the Constructivists (Haftmann, 1: 195).¹³ Gabo and Pevsner wish to paint "the innermost essence of a thing" as opposed to its superficial attributes such as colour and descriptive lines (213). Ultimately, whilst placing their work "on the streets," Gabo and Pevsner state:

We are . . . convinced that art must not remain a sanctuary for the idle, a consolation for the weary, and a justification for the lazy. Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts . . . at the bench, at the table, at work, at rest, at play; on working days and holidays . . . at home and on the road . . . in order that the flame to live should not extinguish in mankind (214).

Gabo and Pevsner's vision for the new society was to take art to the people, not disguised as industrial products, but in the form of new abstract counter-relief sculptures that were constructed on the forms of Life itself, on space and time, using all the technique of an architect, an engineer, a mathematician. So it seems the essential difference between Tatlin's notion of Constructivism and that of Gabo and Pevsner is as follows: the reintegration of art Tatlin has in mind is one in which art is lost to the demands of society, whereas Gabo and Pevsner's reintegration preserves art within life in the Hegelian notion of sublation in line with Bürger's theory.

(viii) Aleksei Gan

The first attempt to formulate the late Constructivist ideology of Tatlin came in 1922 from industrial Constructivist and co-founder of the First Working Group of Constructivists, Aleksei Gan. Gan's book *Constructivism*, was a declaration of industrial Constructivism, and indicated the shift from a purist conception of art, to be found in relief painting and counter-relief constructions, to a practical, mechanical one. Whilst Gan's work does not present itself as a manifesto, it shares the manifesto-form in all but brevity, and is sometimes considered as a manifesto of Constructivism due to its polemical approach and its exposition of the principles of Constructivism. The book also resembles, in extended form, the manifesto Gan

¹³ Tatlin's Monument to the Third International was to contain three stereometric elements which were to rotate at different velocities.

wrote two years earlier for "The First Working Group of Constructivists." Whilst it would not have reached as wide an audience as a concise manifesto, it can serve as a more satisfactory explanation with regard to the intentions of the movement. As is exemplified in the quote on the following page, Gan presents his theory in a creative typographical and rhythmic form. This was perhaps inspired by the "poetically constructed" Futurist manifestos that Marjorie Perloff claims served to develop the manifesto into an art form in its own right (82, 57). Puchner would argue that such manifestos strengthen his theory that the avant-garde made use of the genre of the manifesto in order to inject their art into a traditionally political medium, thus reintegrating art into the praxis of life in line with Bürger's theory.

Gan's book was inspired by the debate in Inkhuk of the previous year between those advocating laboratory art and those in favour of an exclusive production art. Gan's chapter "Revolutionary Marxist Thought in Words and Podagrism in Practice" is concerned with the ineffectual nature of the leading Marxists of Narkompros, the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, which was founded in 1917 shortly after the October Revolution and was responsible for the general cultural and educational policy of the new Russia. Gan writes:

Our responsible, very authoritative *leaders* are unfortunately dealing confusedly and unscrupulously with the art not only of yesterday, but also of today; and they are creating conditions in which there can be no possibility of putting the problems of intellectual-material production on the rails of practical activity in a collective and organised fashion (218).

Essentially, Gan is complaining that the policies of Narkompros are not revolutionary enough, and are hindering the switch to a utilitarian art of the proletariat. The objection is that those in charge of Narkompros promised a lot but "have not justified their promises in practice," rather they "built their practice on the theory of 'spiritual' continuity" (220). Gan is against the impotency of Suprematism and purist Constructivism since under these systems "the proletariat and the proletarianised peasantry take absolutely no part in art. The character and forms in which art was expressed and the "social" meaning that it possessed affected them in no way whatsoever" (219-220). According to Gan, art of this type was on the whole "alien and useless to a class that had its own and only its own cultural perspective" (220). In other words, Gan felt proletarian man was incapable of being "changed" or

spiritually “uplifted” in any way by a pure, autonomous art. The implication is that such an art was too alien to touch the masses largely due to its purposelessness. In Gan’s opinion, in order for man to engage with art it must be a utilitarian art that has a specific function in society.

Gan despairs of this “spiritual” art that is “hostile to the tasks of the proletarian revolution”, but asserts for the first time that “the victory of materialism in the field of artistic labour is . . . on the eve of its triumph,” and that “the current position of social development is advancing with the omen that the artistic culture of the past is unacceptable” (220, 221). Since, for Gan, “art is indissolubly linked: with theology, metaphysics, and mysticism” it clashes with “the mechanical world of our age,” and thus, he proclaims:

Death to art!

It arose naturally
developed naturally
and disappeared naturally. (221)

Gan feels art as it is traditionally understood has reached its natural end and is disappearing due to its lack of relevance in the social and political climate of the time. Gan calls on Marxists to “elucidate [art’s] death scientifically and to formulate new phenomena of artistic labour with the new historic environment of our time” (221). Indeed, Gan observes that these new phenomena are coming in the form of “technical acme” and “social interpretation” (222). That is, the masters of revolutionary art are creating work that is keeping up with the advances in technology and can at the same time be understood by the society of the day.

“From Speculative Activity of Art to Socially Meaningful Artistic Labour” is another chapter from Gan’s book. Here again Gan stresses that because art “by its very nature cannot break with religion and philosophy” and “is powerless to leap from the exclusive circle of abstract, speculative activity,” it must be replaced by something more relevant to the modern Russian society and its citizens (223). In this case, art is to be substituted by “intellectual-material production,” since only such

practical application can have any concrete value and a connection with the “tasks of revolutionary actuality” (223). In Gan’s view, and that of industrial Constructivism, “every effort” must be linked with “the general range of social objectives,” all human activity is to have a function if it is not to appear heretical in the new revolutionary era (223). The theoretical nature of traditional art, Gan feels, has no obvious function to offer the fledgling Soviet society, which requires building from the ground up. What can be described as “artistic labour” or “intellectual-material production” on the other hand has obvious, concrete social meaning in that it can be of use in people’s everyday lives (223). The notion of the artistic labourer implies that each man will be toiling for the good of the new Communist state and that no effort will go to waste as useless abstraction.

One more chapter from Gan’s book worth considering is “Tectonics, Texture, Construction,” which examines the three principles of industrial production. Here Gan observes that although those such as the Suprematists and purist Constructivists “came nearer and nearer to the pure mastery of the artistic labour of intellectual-material production,” they never quite managed to “sever the umbilical cord that still held and joined them to the traditional art of the Old Believers” (224). According to Gan the industrial Constructivists have “played the role of midwife” in finally cutting the cord and allowing the laboratory work of the Constructivists to evolve into practical activity by means of the three principles of industrial production: tectonics, texture and construction (224). Through the mastering of these three disciplines art could be released from its accustomed aestheticising and be set on the path of “purposeful realisation of the new tasks of artistic activity in the field of the emergent Communist culture” (225). Without the stigmatised, elitist label of artist, the constructivist could join with the new “proletarian order” and work in the name of society and Communism (225). Gan’s extremity of formulation and declaration of war on art caused disagreement even within his own Constructivist group.

(ix) The First Working Group of Constructivists: Anti-Art

The First Working Group of Constructivists (or Productivists), which Gan co-founded with Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova two years prior to the publishing of his book, was the most active radical wing of the avant-garde and was associated

with the journals *Lef* and *Novyi Lef*. The Group published a manifesto in 1920, "The Program of the Productivist Group," which is very similar to the ideas outlined in Gan's *Constructivism*, and repeated some of these ideas in a statement in the catalogue to the 1924 exhibition in Moscow, the "First Discussional Exhibition of Associations of Active Revolutionary art." This exhibition was supposed to encourage interaction between those of differing aesthetic approaches to revolutionary art, between those still clinging to purist easel art, such as relief painting, and those fully committed to industrial applied art. The Constructivists of this First Working Group, as can be determined from Gan's own approach, "declare implacable war on art" and are even hesitant to be seen to appear in such an exhibition, anxiously justifying their presence by stating that they are "pursuing only agitational aims" and contributing objects that will provoke discussion between groups (Gan, "Statement" 241). Interestingly, the group states that in "rationalising artistic labour" and giving art a purpose within society, they are not in fact striving to "'socialise' the flowering branches of art and to compel the latter to *apply itself to contemporary social reality*" (241). For this group of Constructivists, their cause is not so much about the "socialisation of art" which can be taken to encompass purist reliefs and counter-relief constructions, as about the concrete organisation of the object's forms in an "organic relationship with its utilitarian meaning and objective" (241). This is industrial Constructivism, Constructivism to the exclusion of all works in which "the workers themselves are not directly involved" (241). For Gan and his followers, a "socialisation of art" does not appropriately describe their intention, being too broad and accommodating a term. These Constructivists are fundamentalist materialists, believing in no other social effect than a material, tangible one in the form of architecture, furniture, clothes, books, porcelain and theatre. This meant that the materials of art could be equated with those of life, and that by manipulating the materials of art you could also manage those of life. This gave the artist or craftsman an increased and direct control over society. This trend arguably had the potential to go full circle to become an aestheticisation of life as opposed to a socialisation of art. With the growth of the materialist worldview these Constructivists believe that the so-called "spiritual" life of society can no longer be reinforced by the "abstract categories of metaphysical beauty and by the mystical

intrigues of a spirit soaring above society” (242). According to their manifesto on Productivism, the group was led to “transplant experimental activities from the abstract (transcendental) to the real” (153). These extreme industrial Constructivists call for not merely a sublation of art into life, but a negation of art, a reintegration of art into life to the point where art is no longer preserved within the praxis of life, and is, to all intents and purposes, destroyed.

The desire was in line with that of the First Working Organisation of Artists, another group participating in the exhibition of 1924: to “make the artist a socially indispensable element of modern life” to the extent that he ceased to be an artist at all and commenced his role as engineer, designer or craftsman (243). This was an anti-art conception of aesthetics in the extreme and can only serve to make Bürger’s theory seem like an understatement when applied to such a radical movement. Bürger only ever uses the term “sublation” in the Hegelian sense of the term, meaning “art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved” (Bürger 49).

Historian Aaron Scharf questions whether Constructivism was, then, “entirely without art?” (162). In repudiating the idea of art as an end in itself and aspiring towards the equation of art with society, were the Constructivists really calling for an artless society? According to Scharf, art as it was known at the time of bourgeois supremacy was preoccupied with the “representation and interpretation of reality,” and consisted of a hierarchic scale which gave primacy to “Fine Art,” to painting and sculpture, over the “practical arts” such as pottery and woodwork (163). The Constructivists tried to do away with the classifications and vocabulary of such an arbitrary scale which had persisted even through the anti-bourgeois movements which had preceded them, though they did not dispense with painting and sculpture as activities altogether. Although painting and sculpture had not traditionally been used in a practical or functional manner, according to the tenets of constructivist realism they were not inherently ends in themselves and could be utilised as “parts of processes [architect’s or designer’s plans and three-dimensional models] through which architecture or industrial products were fully realised” (163). But painting and sculpture were certainly discarded as mediums of “art,” Constructivists believing that speculative art would produce nothing and that production must now be “based on

science and technique” (162). Artists must now consider “social expediency and utilitarian significance” rather than aesthetics, since “the essential conditions of the machine and the consciousness of man inevitably create an aesthetic which would reflect their time” (162).

In answer to Scharf’s question, it might be said that Constructivism was indeed without any self-conscious, self-regulating, and self-sufficient traditional art. Any form of art that wanted to survive under Constructivism had to convert itself into a craft-form; any remaining “fine art” by the early 1920s was evacuated along with its supporters to countries where “ideas emphasising the spiritual content of art were more readily accepted” (Scharf 167). In Groys’ words: “[In the early 1920s] all autonomous artistic activity [was declared] to be reactionary and even counterrevolutionary” (24). The artist Wassily Kandinsky was amongst the supporters of art, along with Gabo and Pevsner, and, not wanting to completely subordinate his art to industrial design, he left Russia for Germany where he accepted a teaching position at the Bauhaus despite the fact that much of his work ran counter to the typical Bauhaus concern with geometrical purity. Kandinsky had been in Germany prior to the First World War and in 1911 had set up *Der Blaue Reiter*, the Expressionist movement whose work tended towards spiritual rather than earthly concerns and which was examined in Chapter One. As Barron puts it, the Constructivists believed that all art should be “rethought and rearranged – nothing a priori would exist. In art as in politics they supported a total break with the past” (“Russian” 15). Art, as it had been known up until this point, was, indeed, to be destroyed. The Constructivists, from a shared “aesthetic vision of the world of technology, . . . sought to derive a modern absolute harmony free from subjective lyrical elements” (Haftmann, 1: 196).

(x) Boris Arvatov

The Constructivist Boris Arvatov was a member of Narkompros within the art section of the adult education division, *Glavpolitprosvet*. In his piece on “The Proletariat and Leftist Art” for the Glavpolitprosvet journal, *Art Herald*, of January 1922, Arvatov confirms Gan’s notion that “the character and forms in which [traditional] art was expressed and the “social” meaning that it possessed affected

them [the proletariat] in no way whatsoever" ("Constructivism" 220), writing that "proletarian art . . . is only possible as an art that is socially useful and, moreover, consciously useful" (Arvatov 226). The idea is that in order for art to engage with the masses it must be a utilitarian art that plays an obvious role in society.

Such an art, for Arvatov, must be "to its very marrow, . . . bound indissolubly with life, evolving with it and deriving from it" (226). In other words, art must be "sublated" into proletarian culture, its forms must not remain "outside and above concrete reality in a rigidly fixed, 'eternally' established form" (226). Art must no longer remain autonomous, an end in itself; it must be liberated "from the fetishism of aesthetic self-sufficiency" and reintegrate itself into life (226). For Arvatov the reintegration of art into life meant a fusion of art with industry to result in industrial design and production. The path to such a proletarian art of the future has been prepared, according to Arvatov, by generations of leftist artists, the Cubists and Futurists through to the purist Constructivists, but such abstract works always remained ends in themselves, with no apparent social aim, because "the working class does not understand the leftist artists," having been raised on "vulgar, cheap, bad taste oleographs and postcards" (227).

Leftist art has been scorned by the conservative bourgeoisie and the Marxists alike, its social and historical significance entirely missed, rails Arvatov. It would seem, according to Arvatov, that even the Marxists of Glavpolitprosvet are unable to "renounce the conventional, the customary, the historically sanctified" (228). Arvatov in fact, to some extent, condones this leftist art, responding to the fact that the leftist artists do not consider their abstract art to require an obvious social function with: "Well, so what? . . . That's what they're supposed to do, that's what they have brains for" (226). Arvatov also later refers to the work of this leftist avant-garde as a "superior culture" which was simply too sophisticated for the working class to grasp (227). In other words, the subjective views of the leftist abstractionists are of no concern to the proletariat and any social significance they might have fails to reach him, let alone to stir him, lying as it does beyond "concrete reality." Groys goes as far as to claim that Arvatov continues to perceive the goal of art to be "the creation of a closed autonomous, internally organized, self-contained whole that does

not refer to anything outside itself, except, perhaps, in the functional sense” (25), but that he sees that goal as unfeasible.

Although Arvatov might acknowledge the value of purist Constructivism, to be found in the early work of Tatlin, he feels we must opt for a more ostentatious, concrete engagement of art and life in the name of the fragile new Communist state and its working men. Nevertheless Arvatov looks upon leftist art up until this point as being invaluable, an essential step along the path towards proletarian, industrial art; it is “the historical bridge over which the working class must inevitably pass to reach the shore of its own art” (228). Cubists and Futurists “gave up the fetishism of ready-made forms” and “decomposed the absolute figurativeness of the old art” to arrive at “constructions of pure materials,” such as Tatlin’s counter-reliefs (228). These avant-garde abstractionists “tore off the formal costumes from the body of art and laid bare its material” (228). Thus, Arvatov comes to the conclusion that it is due to these leftist “non-objective” artists that it is considered possible for form to be a result and not just a point of departure, possible to build “according to social objective” and not to a ready-made stereotype (228). The idea is that it is necessary to go through the process of “laboratory” experimentation with raw materials in order to know just how to obtain the intended effect, to apply them to a particular cause. Only then will it be possible to achieve an “organic fusion” of artistic design with the industrial process (229). The artist/designer must first be in full command of his materials before being let loose in a factory. Both the process of artistic design and the industrial process will of course be subordinate to the “collective’s socially conscious and free will, a will that knows no chaos” (230). In other words, the function of the final product will be determined by the need of the people, since, “purposefulness is [the] law” of industrial art (230). For Arvatov, purist Constructivism is simply a stage in the process towards industrial Constructivism and the true proletarian art of the new Communist state, “the abstractionist [is seen] as the immediate precursor of the proletarian artist” (230).

(xi) Proletkult

It was as early as 1906 that the first official Organisation for Proletarian Culture, known as *Proletkult*, was established, though it did not become an effective

body until after the Revolution in 1917. The organisation professed the aim of creating a uniquely proletarian culture, stating that “art is a social product, conditioned by the social environment. It is also a means of organising labour. . . . The Proletariat must have its own “class” art in order to organise its forces in the struggle for socialism” (244). In December of 1920, Lenin forced the Organisation to submit to the authority of Narkompros, since its chief theorist, Aleksandr Bogdanov, wanted a monopoly on Proletarian art, alleging in the first issue of *Gorn*, 1922, that its members were the only “true representatives of Proletarian culture” and claiming the Organisation’s independence from the Party apparatus (trans. in Gray, Cam. 245).

From 1917 until 1920 however, Proletkult was in full swing, discovering new potential patterns of interaction between art and society. The organisation wanted new proletarian artistic forms that would inform and inspire the new society and that would impinge upon morality and ethics in the form of “child-rearing, family relations and scientific education” (Mally xix). The Proletkult’s far-reaching ambition was essentially to change man by bringing culture to him in a form he could comprehend, make use of, and finally take command of himself; to “turn art in the direction of proletarian aspirations and experience” (Bogdanov 8); to complete and secure the physical revolution of the proletariat with a “spiritual” one (Sadofev 12). Vperedist Lunacharskii, since long before 1917, had been fascinated by the power of art to inspire political action, as a “weapon in the struggle for socialism” (Mally 20). Now, post-revolution, art was no longer needed to speed the course of social change, but it could nevertheless serve to shape the outcome of the revolution, determine its goals and to stabilise the new State. According to Bogdanov, culture had the potential of “organising human perception and hence shaping action in the world” (Mally 8).

Proletarian culture would contain a “more unified, harmonious view of the world than the class cultures that preceded it” because the working class was “organised collectively through a labour process that enhanced comradely social relations” (Mally 8). Bogdanov believed that the proletariat was the “universal class” and thus proletarian culture would be the “most universal and inclusive of all class cultures” (Mally 9). The idea was that the proletariat needed a new art if it was

to succeed against the old bourgeois elite. Thus the masses must break all ties with intellectuals, form their own aesthetic values and turn against “bourgeois culture.” It was not sufficient for so-called leftist art to take the role of the art of Communism. After the failed socialist revolution of 1905, “artists and writers who had once been concerned with social and political problems in their work began to pursue new aesthetic approaches, such as modernist writing and abstract painting, which were much less accessible to popular audiences” (Mally 11). According to Lynn Mally, the intelligentsia “seemed confused and divided over what, if any, its social role should be” (11). These changes were interpreted by workers’ organisations as an abandoning of the lower classes by the bourgeois intellectuals, which led to an increased desire on the part of the new Proletkult to break all allegiances with the artists of the time, to create as great a divide as possible between the abstraction of the “leftist” artists and the practicality of the new proletarian art. Thus, in creating art for the masses and by the masses, modern art of the time was turned on its head; all that was abstract became concrete, tangible and utilitarian, all that was autonomous became reintegrated into life. This would support Bürger’s notion that it was indeed ideology, in this case political ideology, which fuelled the upsurge of the avant-garde, and not the need to compete with or react to materialistic changes à la Scheunemann (see Introduction 3).

(xii) Rodchenko’s Photographic Phase

In 1928, the year before Stalin assumed leadership of the new Communist state, Alexandr Rodchenko, whose piece of almost a decade before has been examined, wrote an essay for the journal *Novyi lef* [*New Left Front of the Arts*] which chiefly concerned itself with Constructivist photography and cinematography. Boris Arvatov had been a founder of the journal in its original form, known just as *Lef*. When Rodchenko wrote his piece in 1919, he had already graduated from pure abstract graphics influenced by Malevich’s Suprematism to a more scientific outlook that embraced the creation of three-dimensional constructions à la Tatlin. By 1922, following the doubt thrown upon Constructivism’s usefulness by Lenin’s New Economic Policy of 1921, Rodchenko was devoting his time to industrial design, propaganda posters and photography. The introduction of Lenin’s N.E.P. meant the

Party monopolised control of cultural production and restricted the areas artists could work in, not trusting the ideas of the Constructivists. By 1928, Rodchenko had fully established himself as a photographer and was engaged in creating a pictorial record of the new Russia, a task which the members of *AKhRR* [Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia] had already assigned themselves six years previously.

AKhRR was set up with the aim of presenting revolutionary Russia in a realistic, documentary manner by depicting the everyday life of the proletariat, the peasantry and the Red Army. Yet *AKhRR* was dependent upon the medium of painting and the style of realism to realise its objectives and Rodchenko scorned their artistic attempts to capture reality without embracing the new methods of technology. In channelling his energies into photography, Rodchenko was affirming his support for a utilitarian medium in place of art and his allegiance to the reign of the proletariat in Communist Russia. Despite this, Rodchenko loved to experiment with the purely formal aspects of photography, with perspective and foreshortening, at one point encountering accusations of formalism due to his neglect of the social and representational aspects of his newfound passion.

Rodchenko's essay of 1928 is entitled "Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot." This essay far from supports any accusation of formalist or abstract intentions behind Rodchenko's work. Rather, the essay demonstrates Rodchenko's determination that photography should take the place of art in the Communist state as a result of its ability to record the reality of contemporary society. The argument is set up in favour of the utility of the photograph over that of traditional portraiture, with regard to the documentation of objective "truth." Rodchenko refutes the common notion that a painted portrait is more useful since it records the "sum total of moments observed" whereas a photograph just captures one "chance moment" and thus can never bear an "absolute resemblance" (251-252). Apart from the fact that Rodchenko believes the artist has "never added an objective synthesis of a given man to the factual world, but has always individualised and idealised him, and has presented what he himself imagined about him – as it were, a personal summary", he even goes on to undermine a hypothetical objective synthesis (251).

Rodchenko takes the example of Lenin and makes a direct comparison between oil portraits, bronze sculptures, etchings and water colours of the leader, and

a file of photographs taken of Lenin at work and at rest, as well as film footage. Rodchenko asks us to tell him which set of records should remain, which provides the most valuable and useful record of Lenin. For Rodchenko the choice is obvious since the first “artistic” selection is only satisfactory to those with a “mania for the romantic” and those who “love beautiful lies and deception” (253). The idea is that the file of snapshots “allows no one to idealise or falsify Lenin,” since once the photographic evidence has been seen “no one would allow artistic nonsense to be taken for the eternal Lenin” (252). For Rodchenko the sum total of all the photographs is the closest one can get to an eternally true representation or any such thing as an “objective synthesis” of Lenin (251). Though, indeed, “no single snapshot bears absolute resemblance, . . . each one on its own resembles him a bit” (252). However, Rodchenko is keen to point out that “with the appearance of photographs, there can be no question of a single, immutable portrait. Moreover, a man is not just one sum total; he is many, and sometimes they are quite opposed” (253). Thus, although the impression of him based on numerous photos or “moments” of him is indeed a synthesis of a sort, it can never be an objective, eternal or absolute synthesis, since a man can never be encompassed fully.

Art, in its persistent yet futile attempt to produce a synthetic portrait that can compete with the snapshot, “has no place in modern life” asserts Rodchenko, and thus, “every modern cultured man must wage war against art” (253). Photography has rendered art redundant with regard to “crystallising” man and recording reality, and, therefore, without function (254). As we have seen from the writings of several other industrial Constructivists, in the era of Communism when art belongs to the people, all things “useless” must be purged.

(xiii) Conclusion

The notion that in Communist society art and artist render themselves “useful” links in to what Aaron Scharf has written about the Constructivist principle of social “expediency.” Scharf’s choice of word implies that Constructivism makes a point of being conducive to the needs of the society of the time. In other words, Constructivists took a pragmatic approach to art in an attempt to bring about and secure the Communist state. They were opportunist in nature and simply chose the

most suitable means to achieve their goal, not wishing to be restrained by any archaic aesthetic principles. Whether such methods were fair or just was unimportant so long as they were productive and socially profitable. The term expediency certainly has a pejorative sense to it and could imply that in Scharf's view, the Constructivists, blinded by their political verve and aspirations, were not true to the discipline from which they arose, and that many artists compromised their true aesthetic principles for the sake of a proletarian society. Groys suggests such a compromise when he writes that the Constructivists who graduated to Productivism "overcame the opposition between autonomous and utilitarian art by subordinating their works to a single universal purpose that deprived art of its autonomy only in the name of something higher than any temporal goal, namely, the transformation of the world as a whole" (29). This can, of course, be said to be true of Malevich who continued to paint non-utilitarian, Suprematist works in secret, after supposedly having moved over to the cause of industrial Constructivism. Arvatov, also, only supported utilitarianism because of his Communist beliefs, since Productivism was the only form of art palatable to the proletariat. Arvatov actually condoned the art of purist Constructivism, seeing it as part of a "superior culture," but could not support an art which the proletariat could not grasp, feeling that any social significance of such an art was lost on this class. These Constructivists perhaps consoled themselves with the fact that the means-ends rationality they were entering into was not that of a bourgeois society but of a new Communist state in the making.

Gabo, Pevsner and Kandinsky are Constructivists who are testament to the fact that those artists who remained true to their cause were unable to render themselves and their art "useful." These artists fled the restrictions of advanced Constructivism, which demanded a solely utilitarian art to meet the needs of the proletariat, to find a more accommodating atmosphere where they could create art as an end in itself if they so wished. As for Tatlin, he remained in Russia and continued to practice Constructivism throughout the 1920s. If it can be assumed that Tatlin's commitment to the Constructivist cause reflected his true desire to make a clean break with the art of the past and engage solely in utilitarian construction, then advanced Constructivism can certainly be taken as evidence of the avant-garde's

desire to sublate art into life via an abolition of the institution of art, but not as evidence that supports Bürger's understanding of avant-gardist sublation.

The restrictions imposed in 1921 by Lenin's New Economic Policy meant that those such as Tatlin and Rodchenko were confined to producing graphics or industrial designs despite their proclamations as to the everyday practicality of their work. After Stalin assumed dictatorial control of Russia in the late 1920s the restrictions on avant-garde artists became even tighter as the principles of Socialist Realism began to take shape. This art form claimed to represent real life scenes in a conventional academic manner. The studios of many avant-garde artists were forced to close and Tatlin ended up teaching Socialist Realism in a State School, taking up conventional painting again in the early 1930s when the 1932 decree "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organisations" was imposed. Groys believes that many avant-gardists were prepared to submit their work to Party control in order to reach their goal of "life-building" (34). Rodchenko became involved in designing posters for the Party in the Realist style to advertise the products of the Moscow Agricultural Industry (see "Peace, Bread, Land," Golomstock 50). Groys writes: "The central issue to these artists was the unitary nature of the politico-aesthetic project rather than whether such unity would be achieved by politicizing aesthetics or aestheticizing politics" (34). In other words, avant-gardists thought they could implement their program of synthesising art and life through the Communist Party's equivalent doctrine. However, they did not realise that in certain circumstances the reintegration of art into the praxis of life could result in its opposite – a Brechtian "false" synthesis – and the determination of external reality by art. Golomstock notes the similarity between the plights of the Russian and Italian avant-gardes in this respect (48-50).

Whilst Soviet Constructivism was absorbed in Socialist Realism, those Russians who were forced into exile by the criticism of Lenin and the tightening of the Stalinist regime served to carry Constructivism further afield resulting in the birth of European Constructivism. The forms of Constructivism those such as Gabo and Pevsner carried with them led to the term being applied to a very broad range of work. In Britain, however, where Gabo lived for some time, the term Constructivism was applied specifically to reliefs and free-standing constructions in metal or plastic.

Essentially, this was Constructivism in its purist state, similar in form to the early relief and counter-relief work of Tatlin. This less radical attempt to equate art and life left the field of art intact, albeit in a transfigured form, and was able to survive and succeed in the democratic nations of the West.

Bürger's theory that the avant-garde attempted a direct assault on the institution of art is of no use in providing an accurate understanding of purist Constructivism, yet part of the theory can be applied to this form of Constructivism if the movement's attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life is acknowledged, that is, if it is accepted that it is possible for abstract art to be "against autonomy" in the way that Mark Cheetham describes it. If, on the other hand, such an intention is ridiculed as nonsensical, since the layman is incapable of hearing such abstract cries of enlightenment, purist Constructivism must be seen, along with such pre-revolutionary movements as Neo-Primitivism and French inspired Cubism, as supporting *l'art pour l'art*. Puchner is certainly one who would take seriously the intention of the purist Constructivists to reintegrate art into life, seeing the existence of their manifestos as evidence enough of such an intention and attempt.

Suprematism and Rayonism, along with Italian inspired Futurism are in much the same position as purist Constructivism, since they too cling to the institution of art and yet wish to engage with life at the same time. Although they are not in fact addressed by Bürger, if taken as attempts to render "art for life" by means of giving art an organic life of its own, these movements can be used to support a belief in the avant-gardist intention to reintegrate art into the praxis of life. Such movements did not, however, ever intend to compromise the institution of art, since it was through such autonomy that art could become abstract enough to eventually overcome its autonomy and take on a life or spirit of its own that would enable it to merge with all other aspects of life. It must be taken into account that Bürger does refine his theory; he does not apply it to those movements of the Russian avant-garde operating prior to the 1917 Revolution, though why these early movements are any less deserving of the definition of "avant-garde" is left unexplained.

The only movement of the Russian avant-garde that can be said to have intended a destruction of the institution of art is industrial Constructivism and its culmination: Productivism. Industrial Constructivism sounded the death knell of art

as an institution more fervently than any other avant-garde movement examined so far. Bürger himself believes his theory can be applied to industrial Constructivism and Productivism: “the Russian avant-garde after the October revolution” (109). However Bürger seems to overlook the fact that industrial Constructivism hoped to sublate art in a most “un-Hegelian” sense of the term. Under Productivism it does seem that art was to be “destroyed” and not merely “enclosed” in the practice of life. As Groys writes: “[With Productivism] we no longer deal with the disappearance of art as an autonomous sphere of activity, as in the initial premise of the avant-garde as a whole, but with a renunciation of avant-garde art itself, a rejection of the artist in his or her extreme productionist embodiment” (28).¹⁴ Every article produced was to be a “product,” an item for consumption by the proletarian masses. Nothing was to be left that existed for no other reason than beauty or meditation, no effort was to be wasted on speculative activity, all produce was to supply a demand, the demand of the proletariat. Bürger expressly stated that when he spoke of the avant-garde’s desire to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, he did not mean into the “means-ends rationality” that it rejects just as the Modernists and Aestheticists do (49; see Introduction 2, fn. 2). As Gray writes: “[Those opposed to Productivism claimed that] in becoming useful, art ceases to exist. In becoming a utilitarian designer, the artist ceases to provide the source for the new design” (246-7). This was not the notion of “sublation” that Bürger had in mind when he formulated avant-gardist intention. Bürger’s Hegelian notion of sublation ensured a preservation of art within life (49; see Introduction 2). This was a dynamic, “dialectical” synthesis as opposed to a fixed, “binary” one. Thus, it seems, industrial Constructivism, though it zealously attacks the institution of art, cannot be understood using Bürger’s theory.

Bürger’s theory, it might be argued, could, at a pinch, be applied in full to those movements operating prior to the onset of industrial Constructivist utilitarianism, and after the onset of the notion that abstract art could be against autonomy (see Cheetham). This would include Russian Futurism, Suprematism, and purist Constructivism, along with the work of Gabo and Pevsner. These movements intended a reintegration of art and life that was in line with the Hegelian notion of

¹⁴ Groys uses the term “productionism” as opposed to “productivism,” but it seems the difference between the two terms is purely etymological.

sublation (a reintegration that preserved art within life). Although this was not to be achieved *via* an abolition of the institution of art, it was intended that the institution would become redundant once art achieved a state of pure abstraction.

In conclusion, it seems that the Russian avant-garde taken as a whole, spanning from 1910 until 1921, cannot be explained by Bürger's theory. Whilst several movements supported some communication with society, the vast majority of movements within the Russian avant-garde had no intention to sublimate art into life *via* an abolition of the autonomous institution of art, and those that did – industrial Constructivism and Productivism – did so at the expense of art itself, destroying it in order to achieve their utilitarian aims.

Whilst theoreticians Clark and Groys, as was seen at the beginning of this chapter, shun any attempt, such as that of Bürger, to provide a single formula for the Russian avant-garde, both make alternative attempts at defining its basic spirit and beliefs, which they claim are shared with the avant-garde as a whole. Clark isolates a core of beliefs that were characteristic of a wide range of Russian and European avant-garde movements. At the centre of this core was the conviction, Clark writes, that revolution entailed the acquisition of a "new vision," and that "this new vision was . . . a precondition, not an end result, of any fundamental political or social revolution" (30). In this way the avant-garde differed from the political revolutionaries who perhaps felt that the revolution would bring about a "new man" with an altered perception of things. For the avant-gardists, however, as Clark writes, "*Revolution was revelation*" (30). The aim was to create the revolutionary consciousness by breaking out of established scientific and aesthetic systems, which would in turn see a renewal of the social system (Clark 38-45). This would tally with the notion that the avant-garde did not attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life *via* a revolutionary abolition of the institution of art, but rather that they believed the reintegration of art into life would naturally bring about an end to art as an institution. That is, altering the aesthetic approach could effect social change on the level of bourgeois institutionalisation. This was the approach of the movements that led from Russian Futurism to the October revolution of 1917.

In the same manner as Clark, Groys identifies some key traits of avant-gardism, writing: "It does not seem an extreme simplification to define [the avant-

garde's] basic spirit in terms of the demand that art move from representing to transforming the world" (14). Groys feels that the "entire artistic practice" of the Russian avant-garde was a reaction to "the intrusion of technology into European life in the nineteenth century" (14). The notion is that it is with the perfection of mimesis by technology that artists reacted by revolutionising their work in order to resist and "compensate for the destructive effect of the technological invasion" on art and life (14). It was through effecting a radical change in their work that the avant-gardists believed they could revolutionise society and save it from its naïve faith in progress. As Groys puts it, the avant-garde's artistic project became "aesthetico-political," as it aspired, having been empowered by the October Revolution, "to the political realization of its artistic projects on the practical level" (21). Groys' argument corroborates Scheunemann's theory that the challenge of technology had a vital part to play in the formation and definition of the avant-garde, yet it is not so quick to dismiss an accompanying avant-gardist ideological intention.

So, whilst Clark and Groys would, no doubt, disagree with Bürger's single, all-encompassing formula for the historical avant-garde, both theoreticians do agree that a common trait of the avant-garde was the desire to become involved with politics and impact upon society. However, where they differ from Bürger is that they do not agree with a theory of the avant-garde that posits an intention to become involved with the praxis of life by means of an abolition of the institution of art. If Bürger's theory is to be of use in furthering an understanding of the majority of the Russian avant-garde movements which operated prior to the October revolution, it certainly needs to be readjusted accordingly. Furthermore, if, as Bürger intended, it is to be applied to those utilitarian movements operating in the wake of the revolution, it must be adjusted to recognise a desire on the part of the avant-garde to incorporate itself into means-ends rationality – a very "un-Hegelian" sense of sublation.

Chapter 5 – DADAISM

In the final third of this study, the movements of Dadaism and Surrealism will be examined. These are the primary movements, along with Russian Constructivism, which Bürger claims his theory of the historical avant-garde applies to. Bürger explains that the common feature of Dada and early Surrealism is that “they do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art but reject that art in its entirety, thus bringing about a radical break with tradition. In their most extreme manifestations, their primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society” (109, fn. 4). It is Dadaism, originating in Switzerland and the USA before spreading to Germany, that Bürger identifies as “the most radical movement within the European avant-garde,” as the first one that “no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society” (22). The Dadaist Movement originated in the neutral countries of Switzerland and the USA before spreading to Germany. It grew up amidst the atrocities of the First World War which engendered feelings of disillusionment and despair. Artists began to relinquish their hope that art would attain a just position in society from which it could effect change. The response to the war amongst these artists was one of cynicism and a resulting nihilism. The prime target was the institutionalised art world which they intended to overturn and abolish, leaving nothing in its place. Nothing would remain that would be subject to bourgeois corruption and market values, that could serve to further consolidate a state of capitalism.

(i) The Dadaist Manifesto

The Manifesto is identified by contemporary critic Alfons Backes-Haase, as the “paradigmatic medium of Dada” (135). Backes-Haase takes Walter Benjamin’s description of Dada art as a medium that became “a projectile” which “struck the audience” and “acquired tactility,” and goes on to describe the Dadaist manifesto as “the paradigmatic representative of a medium that assaults the recipient” (136). The manifesto is able to do this because it is in the unique position of being situated “on

the borderline between the asserted artistic space and the only perceivable space of reality" (136). It is able to operate just as "transmitters of stimuli" from the sphere of reality and can thus cross over from the artistic sphere at will to "literally "assault" the recipient" (136). It was not just the "contents" of the manifesto that were able to leave the artistic sphere and cross the borderline into reality, but it was also the "means of transmission" through which it reached its public. The means of transmission was so "external," or of the non-artistic realm, that it turned the text into an "actual missile" (136). The Dada manifestos "assaulted" their recipients by means of performance recitals, posters, flyers, newspapers and journals. Thus, the means of transmission did not automatically identify the transmitted text as a work of art and the text was able to acquire "a new con-reality" (136). Dada manifestos, when performed as recitals and presented as "a confrontation between reciters (actors) and public," even succeeded in doing away with "the traditional distinction in roles of author and recipient" (136). The Dada manifesto became a "surrogate for action" symbolising the Dadaists' dissolution of boundaries and their move from theory to practice, from the sphere of art into the sphere of life (136). The Dadaists were largely pacifists, but through their manifestos they could feel that they were doing something constructive to oppose the atrocities of the First World War, even if it was only in the form of "deconstruct[ion] of the cultural system that generated the cannibalism" (Kuenzli 53). This was negative action, or Dadaist active nihilism that saw the attempted destruction of art and language, leading to an over-turning of capitalism, materialism and all that had been institutionalised and corrupted by the despised bourgeoisie. The manifesto provided a medium through which the Dadaists could appear united against the ills of contemporary society and the senselessness of materialistic warfare. This was a common negative goal, at a time when they could find nothing positive to aim for amidst the carnage and corruption of human values. So this is an overview of Backes-Haase's analysis of the medium of the Dadaist manifestos, but what do the Dadaists themselves say about their "manifesto actions"?

In several of his manifestos Zurich Dadaist Tristan Tzara expresses a wish to have "no more manifestos" ("Tristan" 24), seeing them as "a communication made to the whole world whose only pretension is to the discovery of an instant cure for political, astronomical, artistic, parliamentary, agronomical and literary syphilis"

("Bitter Love" 33). This is rather contrary since his complaints appear in the form of manifestos themselves. In his "Dada Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love" Tzara clarifies his point: "dip your pen into a black liquid with manifesto intentions – it's only your autobiography that you're hatching" (40). This is perhaps a reference to the lack of homogeneity amongst the Dadaists which meant that the content of a manifesto could not be said to represent the views of the whole group – the implication is that there were no such fixed views in Dadaism. And yet, Tzara went on writing manifestos because it was perhaps this action in itself that gave Dadaism the credibility it needed to be taken seriously. As Backes-Haase writes, "one of the main purposes of the Dada manifesto was to unite the Dadas as a group in the action of communicating their manifestos, the contents of which, in the extreme cases, were irrelevant" (137). The manifesto "generated the illusion of a group with common goals" when all the Dadaists had in common was a rejection of bourgeois systems and values. This is much in line with Martin Puchner's theory that the very existence of the avant-garde manifesto is evidence enough of the avant-garde's intention to sublate art into the praxis of life. The idea is that the existence of the Dada manifesto, irrespective of content, was enough to tell us that the Dadaists wanted to make a tangible impact on bourgeois society. Tzara writes: "Dada doesn't go in for propaganda – Dada is a quantity of life in transparent, effortless and gyratory transformation" (43). Tzara is stressing that the Dada manifestos are not a means of disseminating desires, demands or intentions in the way a political manifesto might, as a means to an end; rather, they are an end in themselves, existing for the sake of their genre's established relationship with society. In other words, in Puchner's line of argument, the Dadaist manifesto itself carries a message without having to say anything, much of its content being unintelligible to the recipient anyway. Sometimes the impression is that the Dadaist manifesto is simply another platform on which to produce art. Section VIII of Tzara's "Dada Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love" simply provides a recipe for a Dadaist poem. The recipe emphasises the importance for the Dadaists of unconscious spontaneous creation, explaining that all is needed for a poem is random words cut arbitrarily from a newspaper article and pulled out of a hat to form a new order. The example cited reads: "when dogs cross the air in a diamond like ideas and the appendix of the meninx tells the time of the

alarm programme . . ." (39). As we will see, this sort of "automatic writing" was to greatly influence the work of the Surrealist writers, suggesting that the content of the Dadaist manifestos was not always irrelevant to its recipients. It was perhaps taken more seriously than the Dadaists ever imagined or even intended, insisting as they did that Dada was not to be interpreted as an art form.

(ii) The Beginnings

The first Dada manifesto was written by Hugo Ball in 1916 when he founded the Dada movement in Zurich. Ball describes Dada as a "new tendency in art" which takes its name, an international word, arbitrarily from the dictionary. Dada, Ball writes, aims at dispensing with "conventional language," with words that "other people have invented," and targets expression of the "word itself" rather than "writing around the actual point" ("Dada Manifesto" n. pag.). However, it is Tristan Tzara's manifesto of 1918 that is considered to be one of the most important of the Dada writings. Tzara writes: "I am writing a manifesto and there's nothing I want, and yet I'm saying certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am against principles" ("Dada Manifesto" 3). Tzara wants to show that "you can perform contrary actions at the same time" (4). In arguing against manifestos via the medium of the manifesto, Dadaism "remains within the frame of European weaknesses" and is actually campaigning against itself ("Monsieur" 1). Tzara is against systems stating that "the most acceptable system is that of having none on no principle" ("Dada Manifesto" 9); he claims to "destroy the drawers of the brain, and those of social organisation, . . . and throw heaven's hand into hell, hell's eyes into heaven" (8). In this way, "*order = disorder; ego = non-ego; affirmation = negation*" (7). These are the "supreme radiations of an absolute art" which show that "there is no absolute Truth" (7, 9). Dada is the "interweaving of contraries and of all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies: LIFE" (13). For Tzara, there is "great destructive, negative work to be done. To sweep, to clean" (12). Dada is the abolition of logic, of memory, of prophets.

Writing in 1920, Richard Huelsenbeck recorded a history of Dadaism, explaining that it was founded in Zurich in early 1916 by Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Marcel Janco and himself at the Cabaret Voltaire, a small bar and

performance venue. Huelsenbeck describes the energies and ambitions of those who participated in the Cabaret Voltaire as “purely artistic” (23). Though all had left their native countries due to the war, agreeing that it had been “contrived by various governments for the most autocratic, sordid and materialistic reasons,” the founders of Dada wanted to make the Cabaret Voltaire the focal point for the “newest art” and not a political soap box (23).

In Huelsenbeck’s native Germany, however, the response of the Expressionists to the fighting was to aim at an art of such inwardness and abstraction, that it led to a “renunciation of all objectivity” (40). This aroused in the German Dadaists, namely Huelsenbeck, who had returned in 1917, and Raoul Hausmann, the psychological insight that “a turning-away from objective reality implied the whole complex of weariness and cowardice that is so welcome to the putrescent bourgeoisie” (40). The idea – that of Georg Lukács examined in Chapter One – is that the shattering of objectivity and the critical capacity of art clears the way for myths, such as those of Nazism, to take hold and gain undue credibility. The insight of Huelsenbeck and Hausmann led them to react against Expressionism with calls for “action,” “bruitism,” “simultaneity” and a new medium, and Huelsenbeck launched a sharp attack against the movement with the first German “Dadaist manifesto,” then entitled “Dadaism in Life and Art,” delivered as a speech in Berlin in 1918 (40). Huelsenbeck writes that the Expressionists, “on pretext of carrying on propaganda for the soul . . . have, in their struggle with naturalism, found their way back to the abstract, pathetic gestures which presuppose a comfortable life free from content or strife” (40). For Huelsenbeck, “the best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life” (40). In other words, they will constantly renew their ideas and their artwork in accord with the issues of the day; they will never, as the Expressionists do, “prefer their armchair to the noise of the street” (40). Huelsenbeck asserts, “the signers of this manifesto have, under the battle cry Dada!, gathered together to put forward a new art, from which they expect the realization of new ideals” (41). Whilst Zurich Dadaist Tristan Tzara was also a signatory of the First German Dada Manifesto, he was very much slower than the German Dadaists when it came to shedding art of its art-for-art’s-sake character. When Tzara mentions the destructive work that needs to

be done he is still speaking very much in artistic terms; when he talks of the overriding of contradictions he is still operating within an artistic framework. In fact, the First German Dada Manifesto remained largely oriented to artistic struggles with its attack on the failure of Expressionism and its allying of Dadaism with the “new medium” of collage and montage (40). The more explicitly political manifesto, emphasising “movement” and “struggle,” came a year later in 1919, in the form of a “program of action” (41). “What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?” was drawn up by Huelsenbeck and Hausmann, who for the first time “consciously adopted a political position” (41). For Huelsenbeck and Hausmann the overriding of contradictions means the equation of art with politics, of Dadaism with Communism (42); when they talk of the need for destructive work they refer to the communist goal that is above all “the destruction of everything that has gone bourgeois” (41).

The manifesto “What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany” sees Dadaism demand “the international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women on the basis of radical Communism”; it demands the “expropriation of property” and the “communal feeding of all” along with the “erection of cities of light, and gardens which will belong to society as a whole” (qtd. in Huelsenbeck 41). The Central Council of the German Dadaist movement then calls for “the immediate erection of a state art centre,” “elimination of concepts of property,” the “establishment of a Dadaist advisory council for the remodelling of life” and the “organisation of a large scale Dadaist propaganda campaign with 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat” (41-42). The Council also demands the continued struggle against Expressionism, against “all directions of so-called “workers of the spirit” (Hiller),” against their “concealed bourgeoisism” (41). With this “program of action,” German Dada moves away from speculative activity and any form of metaphysics and towards an expression of the age, of the everyday, of physical reality.

(iii) Manifestos and Lampisteries of Tristan Tzara

Meanwhile, in Zurich, the Romanian-born Tzara continued to write manifestos. In 1922 he advertised Dada as “the point where the yes and the no and all the opposites meet, not solemnly in the castles of human philosophies, but very

simply at street corners" ("Lecture" 112). In his "Unpretentious Proclamation" of 1919, Tzara promotes the idea that artistic talent is something that can be learnt which in effect "turns the poet into an ironmonger" and dissolves traditional systems of classification that saw artists as God's-representatives-on-earth (15). However, despite Tzara's passion for "disorder," "disorganisation" and "destruction" which he discusses in his "Dada Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love" of 1920 (36), despite his disgust at the Expressionist pretence of unity attained in a spiritual realm, these actions remained a "state of mind," at a stage before the political: "Dada is a state of mind" ("Lecture" 112), "DADA is not a doctrine to be put into practice" ("Bitter Love" 47). Tzara's destruction was aimed at "meanings" and "notions" ("Bitter Love" 36); the destruction of the German Dadaists was aimed at all that was bourgeois and materialistic in order that a communal life-style may take its place. They did not only envisage the destruction of opposites as a state of mind that might in turn have a bearing upon society, rather they envisaged it as a physical and political destruction of the existing social hierarchy that would eventually see poets and ironmongers eating the same food provided at public expense, at the same table, their positions interchangeable. This was a very Bolshevistic approach to the implementation of an equal, unified community, one that saw active revolution as the only means to achieve its goal. As Huelsenbeck said, "Dadaism is German Bolshevism" (44).

However, in order for the artist to sit down with the ironmonger, whether in the mind or in reality, he must first shed his exalted position. This entailed, in both Zurich and German Dada, the destruction of art as it was hitherto known, the destruction of Dada itself. Huelsenbeck wrote:

The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunity to 'buy up art for his justification'. Art should altogether get a sound thrashing, and Dada stands for the thrashing with all the vehemence of its limited nature. The technical aspect of the Dadaist campaign against German culture was considered at great length. Our best instrument consisted of big demonstrations at which, in return for a suitable admission fee, everything connected with spirit, culture and inwardness was symbolically massacred. . . . Dada foresees its end and laughs. Death is a thoroughly Dadaist business, in that it signifies nothing at all. Dada has the right to dissolve itself and will exert this right when the time comes. . . . The time is not far distant (44).

Tzara also calls for the destruction of art by asserting that "the real dasas are against

DADA,” that “the greatest mistakes are the poems we have written,” and that “the (ever-impending) annihilation of art” means that essentially “Dada is dead” (“Bitter Love” 38, 34, 35, 45). The difference between Tzara and the German Dadaists was that in Germany the Dadaists sought to use their influence to first see in the advent of Communism before exerting their right to dissolve Dada: “when the time comes.” Tzara perhaps saw the dissolution of art as a sufficient catalyst for the destruction of the bourgeois political and economic system, seeing no need to enter politics before hanging up his smock. This reflects a less Bolshevikic, revolutionary approach towards Communism. Whilst Tzara clearly had socialist sympathies, reflected in his anti-bourgeois attitude, he felt, it would seem, that a Communist state would evolve naturally once art was absorbed by life. A bourgeois, capitalist state of affairs could only survive as long as an institutionalised society remained in place that the bourgeoisie could control for its own justification.

Alongside his manifestos, Tzara also wrote several “Lampisteries,” articles in which he attempted to throw light on various art forms and artists of his time. One such article is a review of a novel by the French Cubist poet, Pierre Reverdy. The review of “Le voleur de Talan” (“The Thief of Talan”) was published in Tzara’s periodical *Dada 2* in December 1917. Tzara observes that “to art for art’s sake, Reverdy opposes art for life’s sake” (65). Reverdy was one of a number of Dadaist forerunners in Paris who began the destruction of traditional concepts of art, flouting the conventional goal of illusionism via a conscious disassociation and recombination of elements. Reverdy also mooted the sublation of art into life, by means of the technique of collage, even if not seeing it through to its ultimate conclusion. In other words, Reverdy’s Cubism replaced *l’art pour l’art* with *l’art pour la vie* but remained at the level of “system-immanent” criticism at a stage before the “self-criticism” or nihilism of Tzara’s Dadaism.¹⁵ Tzara goes on to say that to Reverdy’s art for life’s sake “we [Dadaists] oppose life for the sake of cosmic diversity, for totality, for the universal.” By this Tzara means that the Dadaists are the first to step outside the system and to become self-critical. The Dadaists no longer play around with the relationship between art and life; rather, they remove art

¹⁵ ‘System-immanent’ criticism and ‘self-criticism’ are Burger’s terms for describing the distinction between the early and later avant-garde movements and are discussed in greater detail in the introduction to this study.

from the equation altogether, subsuming it into life to become a part of the whole. The Dadaists believe life should be “cosmically diverse,” meaning that all the diverse and opposing elements of the universe should be united in a complex but structured whole. That is, art along with all other aspects of society should not stand apart from the mainstream of life but should rather be an integral part of it. Tzara believed that in assimilating itself into life, art would cease to exist as it had been known hitherto and would only survive in an altered state which would no longer be distinguished as “art.” This is presumably the thinking behind his statement “art needs an operation” (“Unpretentious” 16). For Tzara, art must be cured of its superior and other-worldly affectation, of its “*PRETENSION*” (“Unpretentious” 16), and should only exist in its natural state which is not something that can be identified, monopolised, collected or owned. Every man can produce art and thus there cease to be artists as distinct from the mainstream population. Tzara, in the face of a dying profession, explains that he only writes “because it’s natural like I piss like I’m ill” (“Unpretentious” 16).

Likewise, Tzara writes of the French Dadaist Francis Picabia that “his poems have no ending, his prose works never start. He writes without working, presents his personality, and doesn’t control his feelings” (“Francis: ‘l’athlète” 81). Tzara explains in his “Note on Poetry” that with Dadaism “a poem is no longer a formal act: subject, rhythm, rhyme, sonority. When projected onto everyday life, these can become means, whose use is neither regulated nor recorded” (76). The poems of Dadaism will be situated “amongst men, new organisms, creations that live in the very bones of light and in the imaginative forms that action will take – (REALITY)” (77). Of Picabia’s painting, Tzara writes that he has “destroyed ‘beauty’ and built his work with the leftovers: cardboard, money, the bird of eternal mechanism, brain in an intimate relationship with the qualities of machines” (“Francis: ‘l’athlète” 81), that he has “reduced painting to a simple structure” and “everyone will find therein the lines of his own life” (“Francis: ‘pensées” 85), since “it is the great principle of subjectivism, the noble force of reality, the knowledge of the individual, that will characterise future art” (“Bankruptcy” 93). Tzara praises Cubists and Futurists for having “liberated appearances from a cumbersome and futile exterior,” but points out that they are still bound by scientific and academic ideas, ideas that “poison painting” and prevent “free vibration” or spontaneous creation as against that

moulded by observation, experience and ideology ("Francis: 'pensées'" 84-85). Tzara's mission is to crush "the bourgeois spirit, which renders ideas useable and useful, [and] tries to assign to poetry the invisible role of the principle [sic] engine of the universal machine: the practical soul" ("R. Huelsenbeck" 73). According to Tzara the bourgeois believe that with the help of Expressionist poetry they'll "give Christ back to men" (73). The concern is that "in this way it is possible to organise and fabricate everything. Liberty, fraternity, equality, expressionism, are produced" (73). This is in line with Georg Lukács' theory that Expressionism, "in its attempt to create an irrational utopia paved the way for the infamous myths of Nazism" (Ratych et al. 6). In assigning art the role of "principle engine [sic]" at the same time as giving it a functionality that binds it to life, the Expressionists create an unbalanced or "false" synthesis of art and life which gives undue weight to art. In this way, the ideas of art can shape life according to the wishes of those in control of the artists' livelihoods.

In contrast, Tzara wishes to "attach equal importance to each object, being, material and organism in the universe" ("Pierre" 64). Art would become a part of life and not vice versa. This is the primary principle of what Tzara calls the "cosmic" quality of a work of art. This is an essential element of a Dadaist work of art since "it implies order, which is the necessary condition of the life of every organism. Multiple, diverse and distant elements are, more or less intensely, concentrated in the work; the artist collects them, chooses them, arranges them, makes them into a construction or composition" (64). The Dadaist artist is "no longer looking for solutions in the object and its relations with the outside world," since those relations are "cosmic or primary, decided, simple, wise and serious" ("Note on Art" 55-56). In other words the object and the outside world, art and life, are fundamentally related as part of a systematic whole, art being just one of the multiple branches that make up what we refer to as life. Although separated from mainstream life by bourgeois institutionalisation, the roots of art have always remained in life. Tzara believes that whereas art has traditionally been identified as art and classified according to the movement it belongs to, with Dadaism no one "will ever manage to put the most cosmic-diverse writers into pigeon holes. Their richness which belongs to the great apparitions and events of nature, their cosmic

diversity, their supreme power of expressing the inexplicable simultaneously, without previous logical discussion, by severe and intuitive necessity, place them above all classifications and formulae" ("Bankruptcy" 93-94). This theory is in line with Adorno's theory of "nonidentifying thought" from *Negative Dialectics*, which states that it should be possible to think outside the conventional categorical framework (146-148).

(iv) Zurich Dada: Ball, Arp, Janco, Richter

Tzara was undoubtedly the most prolific manifesto writer of the Dadaists, regularly making written proclamations throughout the years spanning 1916 to 1921. After writing the very first Dada manifesto on his founding of the movement, Hugo Ball remained reticent with regard to his art. Ball did, however, publish his diary entries from this time in his book *Flight from Time* of 1927. Most interesting is Ball's entry of June 12th, 1916, when he states that the Dadaist is "convinced of the union of all things, of totality, to such an extent that he suffers from dissonances to the point of self-dissolution . . ." (250). This serves to confirm Tzara's assertion that Dada is "dead," and further serves to strengthen Bürger's argument that the avant-garde attempted to sublate or "dissolve" itself into life. It suggests that "sublation" could indeed be intended, as Bürger states, in the Hegelian sense of the term, implying a submersion and transformation rather than a total negation. That is, art would be preserved in the praxis of life, "albeit in a changed form" unrecognisable to the contemporary mind as art (Bürger 49). The institution of art was to be abolished according to Bürger, but not art per se. Zurich Dadaist Jean (Hans) Arp also confirms this when he explains: "we searched for an elementary art that would, we thought, save mankind from the furious folly of these times [1915]. . . . This art gradually became an object of general reprobation. . . . We wanted an anonymous and collective art. . . . The horrific title of nihilists was bestowed on us. The directors of public cretinization conferred this name on all who did not follow in their path" (24, 26). Although writing not in manifesto form, but retrospectively in 1938, Arp's article can serve to shed light on some of the less than lucid manifestos of the time. At the same time, it should be taken into account that retrospective analyses have an element of self-justification that can alter the impression the writer

gives of the movement in question. Arp clarifies that in reaction to the “slaughter houses of the world war, . . . we pasted, we recited, we versified, we sang with all our soul” in attempt to find a “new order” for art (23-24). However, on realising the futility of all art forms in the face of such atrocities, Dada developed as an art “without meaning or cerebral intention” (24), since how could Dada hope to give meaning to such a senseless world. The only appropriate reaction was to reject “everything that was copy or description,” and to allow the “Elementary and Spontaneous to react in full freedom” (24). For the Dadaists their creations were not art as it was traditionally thought of, but “Realities in themselves,” their poems and pictures were one with nature, serving to “cure human beings of the raging madness of genius and return them rightly to their rightful place in nature” (26). Arp wanted to do away with aesthetics and to “find another order, another value for man in nature. He was no longer to be the measure of all things, no longer to reduce every thing to his own measure, but on the contrary, all things and man were to be like nature, without measure” (27). For Arp, “Dada is for the senseless, which does not mean nonsense. Dada is senseless like nature. Dada is for nature and against art” (28), since “nature is not in opposition to art. Art is of natural origin and is sublimated and spiritualised through the sublimation of man” (30-31). The “new order” Arp speaks of, which the Dadaists were searching for, was eventually to be found in “an order inaccessible in its totality” (24), that is, in the “cosmic” order of nature and of chance that Tzara speaks of. In his “Introduction to a Catalogue” for an exhibition in Zurich in 1915, shortly before the foundation of Dadaism at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, it is clear that Arp is already of the opinion expressed more lengthily in “Dadaland.” Arp writes: “representation is imitation, spectacle, rope-dancing. . . . But art is reality, and the reality we share must assert itself beyond all particularity” (276). Arp goes on to assert that the “new art” is “as new as the oldest pots and vessels, the oldest cities and laws, and has long been practiced by the oldest people of Asia, America, Africa, and most recently during the Gothic Age” (276-277). The argument is that the “non-objective” art of the avant-gardists was nothing original, that abstraction had been in existence for centuries, and that it was ridiculous for the “directors of public cretinization,” whom Arp speaks of, to label the Dadaists as nihilists. It seems certain that the Dadaists did indeed want to

annihilate the bourgeois institution of art that kept creativity behind the doors of museums and galleries segregated from mainstream society, from the praxis of life. However, it does not seem that the Dadaists were nihilistic when it came to art itself; they did not want to annihilate art, but merely to transform it into something more fitting to the times, something as senseless as the times themselves. For the Dadaists, the autonomous institution of art represented all that was wrong with the world – materialism, segregation, bourgeois values – and with its abolition art would inevitably become one again with nature and society. From such a position, art could not comment on society, which suited the position of the Dadaists who felt there was nothing to say in the face of the shame of the First World War, the epitome of man's vainglory.

Arp did at times write in the form of the manifesto. One such piece of 1920, entitled "Manifesto of the Dada Crocodarium" is merely a paragraph in the style of "automatic writing" highlighting the need for spontaneity in Dada. Another piece, "Infinite Millimeter Manifesto," is written retrospectively in 1938 but states very clearly the obligations of the Dadaist creator. Arp writes:

we have to first let forms, colours, words, sounds grow
and then explain them.

We have to first let legs, wings, hands grow and then let them fly sing
form manifest themselves.

I for one don't draw up a plan first as if I were dealing with a
timetable a calculation or a war.

The art of stars, flowers, forms, colours is part of the infinite (293).

This seems to be Arp's account of automatic writing, his explanation of its spontaneity. Arp feels that art cannot be treated as something man can impose his own order upon, since it is part of the infinite cosmic order of life. Art must be set free from man and given the space to form itself naturally. Man if he wishes can then come in and "explain" the "forms, colours, . . . sounds."

Along with Arp, Tzara, Ball and Huelsenbeck, Hungarian born Marcel Janco was co-founder of the first Dada group in Zurich. Janco was much involved in writing for the various retrospective Dada exhibitions and anthologies; however, he was also involved with the *Radikale Künstler* group from the beginning of 1918 and wrote several manifestos at this time. In 1919 he contributed to the writing of the manifesto of the "Radical Artists". The manifesto was also signed by Jean Arp,

along with Hans Richter, Fritz Baumann, Viking Eggeling, Augusto Giacometti, Walter Helbig and Otto Morach. The artists proclaim:

We, the artists, want to take part in the ideological development of the State; we want to exist in the State and take our full share of responsibilities. . . . The spirit of abstract art represents an enormous extension in man's feeling of freedom. Our faith is fraternal art: art's new mission in society. . . . Our highest aspiration is to realise a spiritual basis of understanding for all men (n. pag.).

In a retrospective piece, "Dada at Two Speeds," written for *Dada*, the 1966-67 exhibition shown in Zurich and Paris, Janco points out that in the manifesto of 1919 he and his fellow artists were "expressing our positive attitude to life and society" (37). Retrospectively Janco writes: "For us it was no longer true that Dada was against everyone and everything. We ourselves had gone beyond negation, and no longer needed aggression and scandal to pursue our positive course" (37). Here Janco explains that there are two phases of Dada, the first being "the negative speed" of destruction, violence, scandal and apparent nihilism, the second being the positive phase in which a new meaning was found for art in society due to the "new style of expression through automatism and the discovery of the game of chance, faith in the instinct of art and in the power of the subconscious" (36). The *Radical Artists* had a newfound confidence in the power of their abstract art to carry "programmatic sociopolitical ideas" (Seiwert 130). Amongst other things Janco was calling for the "democratisation of art," believing that "art was to be directly accessible to everyone" since abstraction "lent art a generally and internationally intelligible language" and could "result in the end in an art that would unify all peoples" (Seiwert 126). At the time the manifesto of the Radical Artists came out in 1919 a new group was formed, *Das neue Leben* (The New Life), which in Janco's words, "embraced all the progressive forces of the country" ("Two Speeds" 37). Essentially, Janco is disputing the common nihilistic interpretation of Dadaism which had "impressed minds and imprinted a stamp which could not be effaced" (37). Though the first negative phase of Dada "very often remains in the same state, not having found soil fertile enough to expand into the positive" (37), in Zurich this was not the case and some of the most significant plastic artists of that generation – Marcel Janco, Jean Arp, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling and Max Ernst – did not use negative Dada methods. Janco confirms the view that the

Dadaists only had destructive designs on the bourgeois institution of art and not on art itself. Though literary artists such as Tzara claimed art was dead and Dada a joke, Janco claims that they were only posing as nihilists in order to shock the bourgeois into paying attention, and “to make themselves more interesting . . . and novel” (36). According to Janco these were just empty scandalous words and along with his fellow plastic artists he moved away from the influence of the literary artists towards a more honest and affirmative portrayal of Dada. With Janco’s Dada, art was reborn with a new conception, meaning and place within society. Janco acknowledges, however, that this positive, productive side of Dada often remained, and still remains, unknown (37).

The strong sociopolitical basis of Janco’s art was developed in dialogue with Arp and Richter. In an interview Janco comments:

The artist was to step down from his pedestal and, as in the Middle Ages, work anonymously. He was to be again like a craftsman and produce his work out of the craft process, which had to be re-established, retaught, and relearned, freed altogether from its ossification. To this extent we also opposed industrial mass production. Art was to be returned to life. We were to be allowed to use it, not entomb it in museums (131).

This would confirm Bürger’s theory that the avant-garde did not mean to destroy art as such, but to transfer it to the praxis of life where it would survive in a changed state. Janco’s thinking behind this assimilation of the artist and his work into mainstream society was that all people should be unified and equal. The bourgeois and all elitist institutions which he uses to justify and strengthen his existence should be abolished. Essentially, Janco wanted to “restore humility to art and the artist” in the name of a new anti-materialistic, socialist order (“Interview” 131).

The writings of Hans Richter, signatory of the 1919 manifesto of Radical Artists, support Janco’s division of Dada into two speeds or phases. Richter writes retrospectively that “Dada’s propaganda for a total repudiation of art was in itself a factor in the advance of art” (“Anti-Art” 40). In repudiating art, Richter felt the Dadaists released themselves from the controlling factors of traditional “rules, precepts, money, and critical praise” (40). This resulted in the “absence of any ulterior motive” of art which enabled the Dadaists to “listen to the voice of the “Unknown” – and to draw knowledge from the realm of the unknown” (40). In

concrete terms, this meant that chance was “recognised as a new stimulus to artistic creation” (41). Chance was part of the cosmic order of things – an order so complex as to appear chaotic and to remain unknown. Chance, Richter claims, “may well be regarded as the central experience of Dada, that which marks it off from all preceding artistic movements” (41). Chance became the trademark of the Zurich Dadaists. Artistic creation was now down to the spontaneity of the individual artist and was no longer hampered by aesthetic conventions.

Richter identifies the climax of Dada activity in Zurich – both its greatest success and its end – as the grand *soirée* in the Saal zur Kaufleuten on 9th April 1919. This was an evening of Dada performances and recitals designed to inflame the public. In the second half, Richter started with an address entitled “Against, Without, For Dada.” Richter addresses his audience: “Don’t worry! Nothing will take place that you would accept or cherish, that would facilitate your understanding or improve your attitude to something which you, in your cheap ways, could never accept” (322). Richter’s aim it seems, along with cursing the audience, was to highlight the fact that Dada “lies beyond any group, movement or Dada magazine” (321), that Dada is not something one can “belong” to. With Dada there are no rules as with the Cubist and Futurist academies Tzara so despises (“Dada Manifesto” 5); the only thing to be expected is the “unpredictable.”

This new “free” art may have had no ulterior motive as such, yet it was perhaps in this lack of function, this freedom, that art found its natural and primal function, not one that had been assigned to it by man. As Richter and his co-artists proclaimed in the Radical Artists manifesto of 1919, “Art . . . should serve as a basis for the new man. . . . [It] should belong to everyone without class distinction. . . . Our highest aspiration is to realise a spiritual basis of understanding for all men” (n. pag.). So the new function of art became one of spiritual enlightenment for the masses via its newfound freedom from bourgeois constraints and imposed functions. To spiritually enlighten was the natural function of art and not one that had to be attributed to it by artists. Artists simply had to spontaneously create and their creations would do the rest, taking on a life of their own. So artists could, the Dadaists believed, “take part in the ideological development of the State” by stepping down from their pedestals, assimilating with mainstream society, creating and

promoting spontaneous creativity amongst all men.

By 1920 Richter had returned to his native Germany and in May 1922 he participated in the First Congress of the International Union of Progressive Artists, held in Düsseldorf. At the time of the Congress, along with Russian Constructivist, El Lissitzky, and member of the Dutch De Stijl group, Theo van Doesburg, Richter published a "Declaration" in which the authors took a more active stance to that of the Union. Influenced by Russian Constructivism's participation in the building of a new society, the authors decided idealist abstraction was not enough. The Declaration states:

We repudiate the art exhibitions of today as warehouses for the commercial exchange of things that are simply ranged alongside one another in an intrinsically unrelated manner. . . .

We must recognise that art has ceased to be a dream world that opposes itself to the world of reality, that it has ceased to be a means for unveiling cosmic mysteries. Art is a universal and real expression of the creative energy which organises the progress of humanity. That is to say: art is a tool of the universal process of labour.

We must struggle if we are to transform this view into reality. And we must be organised in order to enter on this struggle. This is the only way that collective human energy can be liberated. Considerations of principle and economic considerations are thereby unified (315-316).

By this stage it seems Richter has become very politically minded, as he says himself many years later in 1965, "[after the First World War,] revolution in Germany, risings in France and Italy, world revolution in Russia, had stirred men's minds, divided men's interests and diverted energies in the direction of political change" ("Anti-Art" 44). Richter went on to found the Constructivist periodical, *G*, in Berlin in 1923. Richter was very much involved with the Soviet form of Constructivism rather than its depoliticised European version. Soviet Constructivism was inseparable from politics and aimed at a "socialisation of art" that would serve the proletariat and enhance the physical and spiritual condition of society. A productive approach to society was indeed, it seems, also the aim behind "second speed" Dadaism in Zurich. But Dada was less overtly political or militant than other movements, and by 1919 it had served its purpose of creating a "tabula rasa" with regard to art, and now it was left to others in the revolutionary upheaval of the aftermath of war, to transform art according to their own ideological beliefs.

(v) Berlin Dada: Huelsenbeck and Hausmann

Of course, Dadaism did not confine itself to Switzerland. Indeed, as has already been mentioned, Richard Huelsenbeck carried the word “Dada” to Germany. Huelsenbeck was active in Zurich until 1917 when he transferred his efforts to Berlin. It was in Berlin that he wrote the “First German Dadaist Manifesto” and “What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?” examined earlier. Huelsenbeck wrote the latter of these manifestos in conjunction with Dadaist Raoul Hausmann who became very influential in Berlin Dada. Whereas Zurich Dada had prospered in exile during the war, it was Berlin Dada that thrived during the years of political unrest in the immediate aftermath of war. In 1920 Huelsenbeck’s “Dadaist Manifesto” of 1918 was reissued as the “Collective Dada Manifesto.” The signatures of Raoul Hausmann, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, Franz Jung and George Grosz were amongst those added to lend the manifesto a collective status. It was in this manifesto that Huelsenbeck explains that the “the word Dada symbolises the most primitive relation to the reality of the environment,” that it ceases to “take an aesthetic attitude toward life” in the manner of the “bloodless abstraction of Expressionism” (242, 246). Huelsenbeck insisted that “Dada champions the use of new medium [materials] in painting” which would lead to “amazing new possibilities and forms of expression in all the arts” (245, 246). Huelsenbeck wanted an art that “burns the essence of life into our flesh” (243), and Expressionism was not fulfilling that desire. Huelsenbeck’s manifesto had first been presented at Berlin’s first official Dada evening on April 12th, 1918. At the same *soirée*, Hausmann presented his first manifesto “The New Materials in Painting,” taking his title directly from Huelsenbeck’s work. Hausmann was championing the reduction of art to its pure material existence. He wanted his work to have a direct and impartial encounter with its material surroundings, to become one with the “cosmic” order of things. Hausmann wrote: “In Dada you will recognise your real state of mind: miraculous constellations in real material, wire, glass, cardboard, tissue, corresponding organically to your own equally brittle bulging fragility” (qtd. in Benson 80). This was the evolution of the Dadaist technique of montage that sought to engage directly with modern society. Hausmann, in the same way as

Huelsenbeck, attacked those who wanted to “sustain imposed conventions.” For Hausmann, “the painter paints as the ox lows” (84). Expressionism is described as “the symbolism of . . . inner necessity, . . . [which] constantly declines deeper into aesthetic world-domination” (84). Hausmann objects to the Expressionists’ removal of art from the “enormous uproar” of life, maintaining that such an art of “inner necessity” is just a “hullabaloo” (87). In contrast to the new materials of Dada, Hausmann describes the material of the Expressionist painter as terminating in “an almost astral imbecility of colour and linear values for the interpretation of so-called spiritual sounds” (86). However, Hausmann’s introduction of “real” materials into Dada was not in fact meant as a total renunciation of the metaphysical. According to Timothy Benson, Hausmann “believed he could unlock the dynamic realm of the Spirit behind concrete reality” (80). Whilst the Expressionist sought to achieve unity with the divine via a distancing from nature, Hausmann felt the mind was subject to the law of substance and must go via nature and not bypass it if it is to achieve any connection with the Spirit. The idea was that art and artists should not deny their roots in the desperate attempt to flee the difficulties of life. Ultimately Hausmann sought a balance between man and his surroundings and persistently pursued syntheses of all conflicting tendencies, such as Expressionism and naturalism, yearning for a cosmic wholeness.

The Dadaist montage procedure was set by Hanne Bergius as the “Dionysian” pole in what she termed Berlin’s “artistry of polarities.” Bergius sets this pole against the “Apollonian” pole of the Dadaist art of “metamechanics” of later years. These differing poles are a similar concept to Marcel Janco’s concept of “Dada at Two Speeds” examined earlier. In both cases a chaotic, irrational, nihilistic Dada is contrasted with a more positive, disciplined, meaningful Dada. Bergius claimed Berlin Dada juggled the two polar styles in attempt to encompass the contradictoriness of reality. From 1919 onwards, Berlin Dada’s art of metamechanics related science and technology to art in an attempt to counter-balance the Dionysian element in Dada. Whilst Berlin Dada had “criticised the one-sided, top-heavy demand for legitimacy of a technological, science oriented and mechanistic civilisation – the separation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian – presenting its deadly petrifications, the callused life extradited to a culture of

rationality,” it equally did not want to fall victim to prioritising the Dionysian over the Apollonian (Bergius 20).

The Dadaist following the montage procedure “demanded artless concepts and works: his projects opened up to unexpected, shocking, and provoking mixtures so that art could become raw material again and win back life. The aim was to close the gap between culture and life” (Bergius 12). This gap between culture and life was one that had been opened by the bourgeois ideal of art which “excluded the Dionysian, the violent, reckless, and vital energy of life, and thus fell prey to a paralysis of traditions, norms, and terms, that could not grasp actual experiences any more. It showed the great alienation between culture and life, mind and body” (Bergius 12). Dionysian Dada attempted to engage with politics and challenge social conditions in attempt to bring down the hierarchical society which fostered the prevailing bourgeois ideal of art. Once social conditions had changed and society was classless, the Dadaists believed that it might be possible for the “utopian dimensions” of metamechanics to show themselves: “the creation of “a new human being”, master of rationality, and not its object!” (Bergius 20). Until such a time, however, Dadaists practised an artistry of polarities which first brought in the Dionysian montage procedure to sweep away the atrophying bourgeois ideal of art and then counter-balanced it with the Apollonian art of metamechanics.

Furthermore, the Apollonian element in the Dadaists’ metamechanical constructions was always “infiltrated by the Dionysian: the ground is trembling, a threatening uneasiness remains” (Bergius 301). In other words, the metamechanical constructions “did not leave Dada’s terrain, even though they were already pointing ahead into developments of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), surrealism and constructivism,” and despite the fact that they were fulfilling the Dadaist montage conception of seeing art “in the perspective of life” and going “beyond” nihilism. One example of such a mechanical construction is Hausmann’s *Mechanical Head* (*The Spirit of Our Age*) of 1920. This construction is not actually functioning in the manner of many Constructivist works, with an assigned goal or purpose; rather, the scientific instruments and artefacts affixed to the wooden head of a tailor’s dummy “remind us of the demand for a ‘dry,’ aesthetically indifferent production, only to be found in an alliance between art and science” (Bergius 300). Berlin Dada’s

destruction of the traditional work of art, its success in reengaging with life, did not result in its end; rather, it resulted in a new conception of art that, under the influence of a mechanisation affecting all areas of life, went beyond Dadaist montage chaos to see science “in the perspective of art.” From a socialisation of art the Dadaists moved to an aestheticisation of science and technology.

(vi) Hanoverian Dada: Schwitters

Also in Germany at this time, though not working directly with Hausmann and Huelsenbeck, was artist, poet, constructor, and typographer Kurt Schwitters. After the First World War Schwitters became the chief representative of Dada in Hanover. In 1919, after a year of experimenting with collages made from refuse such as discarded tickets and cigarette papers, Schwitters invented what he called “Merz,” a name which he came to attribute to all his activities and which represented a certain *Weltanschauung*. “Merz,” the Hanoverian Succession of Dada, had no meaning as such when Schwitters formed it; writing retrospectively, Schwitters states it stands for “freedom from all fetters, for the sake of artistic creation” (59). In 1920 Schwitters wrote a piece on Merz to accompany an exhibition of his works in Munich. Schwitters explains that the selection of works was “intended to show how I progressed from the closest imitation of nature with oil paint, brush and canvas, to the conscious elaboration of purely artistic components in the Merz object, and how an unbroken line of development leads from the naturalistic studies to the Merz abstractions” (57). Schwitters goes on to explain how he broke away from the academic transfer of “three-dimensional corporeality to a two-dimensional surface” (57), and then writes: “I first succeeded in freeing myself from the literal reproduction of all details. I contented myself with the intensive treatment of light effects through sketch-like painting (impressionism)” (58). Secondly, Schwitters then went on to produce his pure expressionist abstractions: “I abandoned all reproduction of natural elements and painted only with pictorial elements . . . with a view to expression” (59). Finally Schwitters concludes: “Today [even] the striving for expression in a work of art . . . seems to me injurious to art. Art is a primordial concept, exalted as the godhead, inexplicable as life, indefinable and without purpose” (59).

Though often termed a Dadaist due to his close association with and sympathy for the work of certain Zurich Dadaists, Schwitters did not call himself a Dadaist; he cultivated nonsense as against logical meaning in much the same way as the Dadaists, believing this enhanced the possibilities for artistic building, but he very much wanted Merz to be seen as an independent movement. Schwitters distinguishes between the Zurich Dadaists under Tzara whom he terms the “kernel Dadas” and the Berlin Dadaists under Huelsenbeck whom he terms the “husk Dadas.” Schwitters explains that the kernel Dadaists were still operating within the realms of aesthetic abstraction where as the husk Dadaists with their photomontage procedure were “oriented towards politics and against art and against culture” (60). The outlook of the latter was alien to Merz, and Schwitters wishes to say that his movement emphatically rejects “Herr Richard Huelsenbeck’s inconsequential and dilettantish views on art, while it officially recognises the . . . views of Tristan Tzara” (60). For Schwitters, “Merz aims only at art, because no man can serve two masters” (60). Ultimately Schwitters aim is the “Merz composite art work” which would embrace all forms of art and efface the boundaries between them (62). In the wake of the Great War, the Berlin Dadaists had given up on the idea that a purely artistic movement could invoke social change. Schwitters, on the other hand, clung to the idea that his Merz movement could engender cross-cultural communication without entering the realm of politics. For Schwitters as well as many Dadaists, the fragmentation of culture, the ineffective means of synthesising or unifying different levels of cultural constructs, lay at the heart of what was “objectionable and tyrannous about their contemporary society” (Foster 105). As Stephen Foster points out, despite Schwitters’ reverence for art, he would “never have endorsed” an art for art’s sake position (104). Schwitters was rather striving for a wholeness, “a single model by which all levels of culture could be transacted equally” (105), “a unified means of perceiving and achieving realities” (107). Such a model would be capable of “integrating the minutest day to day experiences with no less a task than the reconstruction of post-World War I German society” (105). According to Foster, “Schwitters was interested . . . in readdressing what he perceived as a failure exactly in the “political” roots of culture” (107). Schwitters was objecting to the pluralism of cultural constructs which resulted in a variety of bases on which ideas and concepts

were operating within culture which could be adopted according to “the exigencies and conveniences of reigning socio-political ‘interests’” (107). Foster sets himself up against other approaches to interpreting Schwitters’ work. Rex Last claims that “Schwitters removed himself from political and social reality into his own world,” that he created “a magical realm divorced from reality,” a “private world of shapes and patterns” (51, 55, 61). But if Schwitters himself stressed his distance from the politicisation of art by the Berlin Dadaists this was only, as Dorothea Dietrich points out, after he had been rejected by them on his first bid for membership (119).

Although Schwitters emphatically denounced political tendentiousness in art he certainly, Dietrich states, attempted to “call attention to the reformatory possibilities of true art” (119). For Schwitters “true” art was an art that was formed unconsciously of “inner necessity”; according to Dietrich it was a “quasi-organic” growth process (120). Schwitters pronounced his art to be a form of what he termed *Erlebnis* (experience). If art could activate experience in its recipients, so it could “initiate personal and societal transformation” (120). Thus, Schwitters concludes that art is a crucial tool in the creation of a new society.

In 1923 Schwitters co-signed the “Manifesto of Proletarian Art” along with Theo van Doesburg, Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara and Christoph Spengemann. Here Schwitters states very clearly that he is in fact against the creation of a proletarian art as such, seeing the setting up of a cult to rival that of the bourgeoisie would only serve to “help preserve the corrupt culture of the bourgeoisie” (120). Rather, Schwitters would like to see an art that overrides social differences and seeks to “influence the whole of civilisation,” an art that distinguishes itself from politics and social structures and attempts “by its own means, to arouse man’s creative powers” (120). Indeed, the distinction in ideology between Merz and Berlin Dada soon became apparent in the style of the work produced by the movements. Matthew Gale speaks of the “difference between the abstraction of Merz and the aggressive realism of Berlin Dada” (153). Members of Club Dada in Berlin, John Heartfield, George Grosz and Raoul Hausmann used cutting edge satire in the form of collage and photomontage to get across their political message. Bürger uses the photomontages of Heartfield to illustrate his theory of the avant-garde, writing that “they are not primarily aesthetic objects but images for reading (*Lesebilder*). Heartfield went back

to the old art of the emblem and used it politically” (75). Gale observes: “The raw material of photographs was flexible and realistic, but avoided the use of discredited pictorial realism. In the process of experimentation it became clear that, even when severely distorted or cropped, photographs remained convincing as slices of reality and as such demanded the observer’s attention” (128).

While Schwitters was excluded from Club Dada because some members, notably Huelsenbeck, were not convinced of his political commitment, he maintained contact with Tzara and the Zurich Dadaists, and his collages were greatly appreciated by Hausmann which led to a productive friendship that was to prosper even after the Second World War. Though Schwitters’ work may not have been overtly political, his collages challenged conventional notions of beauty and presented an ideological position in which “the undervalued was revealed in art as beautiful, just as in the political sphere, the contribution of the ordinary worker was recognised for his full worth” (Gale 157). In 1946, Schwitters and Hausmann, their work having been suppressed during the war years, sought to recapture the experimentation of the 1920s and collaborated to form a review, *PIN* (Poetry is Now), to keep the spirit of Dada and Merz alive. The collaboration suggests that Hausmann had come to comply with Schwitters’ much less direct and more optimistic approach to politics. The “PIN Manifesto” reads:

Poetry does not serve any more for needs . . .
Poetry of the PRESENT understands its objects, the words, as agents
of our living space . . .
The poetical (non-musical) sound creates complex dimensions:
functional, temporal and numerical, it shows by these inter-relations
the “coincidentia oppositorum” of the things by their own value
These values are no ware of social classes, nor of historical aspect
Poetry of the PRESENT is outside the restrained history, outside the
coward anthropophagous and anthropomorphous utilisations
PRESENT poetry aims at the relative life of untamed and non-
classified functions, avoiding false semblances
PRESENT Poetry is neither FOR nor AGAINST, neither classic, nor
romantic, nor surrealistic
It integrates being and it IS
Poetry Intervenes Now
Presence is New
PIN (392).

Essentially Schwitters and Hausmann’s idea here is that Dada poetry is not serving anyone or anything; it is not functional, utilitarian or tendentious; it is not in

the interests of either the middle or the working class; it does not belong to any movement as such or propagate any philosophy. Dada poetry “integrates being” and simply “IS.” In other words, Dada poets integrate elements of everyday life into their works so that poems become “agents of our living space.” Furthermore, the idea is that in becoming an agent of living space, “poetry intervenes now” in the praxis of life and becomes a central tool in the reconstruction of society. Thus, through its own aestheticism, poetry can reach out to society more effectively than any tendentious, political art. In the wake of the Second World War, Hausmann was perhaps forced to acknowledge the futility, or in Bürger’s terms the “failure,” of the Berlin Dadaists to reintegrate art into politics effectively. In 1946 the prospect of a retreat into an aestheticism which yet retained the possibility for social reformation must have seemed highly attractive to Hausmann. The poetic form in which this manifesto appears, similar to that which can be seen in Arp’s post-war “Infinite Millimeter Manifesto” examined earlier, suggests that the Dadaists, together with the advanced Constructivists of the Russian-avant-garde, were influenced by the Futurists’ attempt, according to Marjorie Perloff, to turn the manifesto into an art form (80-115). Perloff identifies a crossover between Futurist manifestos and Futurist poetry, concluding that in transforming the manifesto into a “quasi-poetic construct (82),” the theory becomes the practice (90). Such an argument for Dadaist technique might be used by Puchner to support his notion that the avant-garde manifestos exemplify the attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of politics in line with Bürger’s theory. That Dada had apparently given up the nihilistic attempt to “negate” art into the praxis of life only serves to support Bürger’s theory that the avant-garde attempted to “preserve” art within the praxis of life in the Hegelian sense of “sublation”.

(vii) Cologne Dada: Ernst and Baargeld

It was not only Hanover that was host to a succession of Berlin Dada. Dada reached the city of Cologne too, where it again took on its own distinctive character. The Cologne Dadaists can be divided into those who, in the light of post-First-World-War carnage, committed their art to political action in the manner of the Berlin Dadaists, and those more inclined towards aesthetic subversion in the manner

of Schwitters. However, for a short time there existed a coalition between these groupings because both groups were given the opportunity to present their works at the same exhibition. In 1919 the groups were invited to contribute to an otherwise largely Expressionist exhibition at the Kunstverein in Cologne. Max Ernst, the leading figure of Cologne Dada, and his main collaborator, Alfred Grünwald (known as "Johannes Baargeld"), were joined in their attacks on the status quo by more politically-minded artists such as Frank Seiwert, Anton Räderscheidt, Marta Hegemann, Heinrich Hoerle and Angelika Fick Hoerle. Ernst and Baargeld's anarchic subversion of the generally accepted themes and techniques of Western art were viewed by Hoerle and Seiwert as apolitical; artists wanting to engage with the praxis of politics failed to appreciate the revolutionary potential of such anti-conventional, subversive works. In *Bulletin D*, the catalogue which accompanied the 1919 exhibition, Baargeld ridiculed Western artists who worked with traditional artistic practices: "Cézanne is chewing-gum. The Grünwald swallows van Gogh's yellow dentures. Van Gogh has bad breath and is dead" (132). All four artists contributed to *Bulletin D*, but Hoerle and Seiwert eventually withdrew their work from the exhibition declaring Dada as no more than "bourgeois art marketing" (qtd. in Weiss). Hoerle and Seiwert did not see the political potential of such a compromise with commercialism and in 1920 split from Ernst's group to form the separate "Stupid" group which later became known as the *Gruppe Progressiver Künstler* (Group of Progressive Artists) and aimed at developing a directly proletarian, activist art. This was in opposition to the claims of Baargeld in *Bulletin D* which read, "there is no 'activist' art. The artist is part of the life he destroys. Activism is the criterion of all life" (134). Baargeld and Ernst felt that art had no need to participate in politics in order to reform society since art, growing from "the belly of society," cannot help but have a bearing upon it, and "is revolutionary down to the belly" (133). The distinction between Ernst's Dada group and the Stupids can be seen as a reflection of the distinction between Schwitters' Merz in Hanover and Huelsenbeck's Dada group in Berlin. Whilst "Huelsendada" and the *Gruppe Progressiver Künstler* can clearly be cited as examples which support Bürger's theory, since their violent politicisation of art can be viewed as an attempt to reintegrate of art into the praxis of life, Ernst and Schwitters' forms of Dada are not

so useful to Bürger. These forms of aesthetic subversion, despite their view to social reformation, still take place within the aesthetic realm, and whilst they may not be forms of *l'art pour l'art*, art very much remains art for Ernst and Schwitters and does not cross over into the social realm of politics. To say that Bürger could argue that any move away from *l'art pour l'art* in favour of an art that seeks to have some bearing upon society can be seen as an attempt to reintegrate art into life, is dubious.

Ernst and Schwitters had in fact exchanged visits between Cologne and Hanover in the spring of 1920. Ernst was eager to be part of the national and international networks of artists that engaged in active interchange. Dada was based on such dialogue and Ernst sought such exchange with Schwitters in particular. The two artists were compatible in their less actively political approach, and in his article "Lucrative History-Writing," Ernst shows empathy not just for the plight of Schwitters in the face of the bourgeois authorities, but also for that of German Expressionist and activist Kurt Hiller (examined in Chapter One). In 1920 Ernst writes:

As the inexplicable became known Kurt Hiller and Kurt Schwitters were immediately released from protective custody. In this successful way they were successfully rendered thoroughly harmless. As a covering for their nakedness, both were forwarded a schammade [name of the Cologne Dada journal the text appeared in] from the benevolent chief office Dada W/3 [a branch of Cologne Dada] of the activistic collecting centre for the harmless (127).

Whilst Ernst despised the "succubine 'benevolent spirit'" of Expressionist metaphysics (126), whilst he was against all those calling themselves "activists," he perhaps identified with the side of Hiller that led Walter Benjamin to call him a "theoretician of Activism" ("Author" 91). In other words, Benjamin defined Hiller's activism as "revolutionary only in its mentality, but not in its production," in its tendency but not in its technique (Raunig 1). Ernst was keen to establish links with other artists who shared his approach towards social reformation; he did this in the hope that his own work would be taken more seriously and not merely denounced as an apolitical collaboration with the bourgeois art market.

(viii) Dutch Dada: van Doesburg

Dada, the most international of all avant-garde movements examined, also

had connections with Holland. Friend of Kurt Schwitters, and founder of the Dutch Constructivist Group *De Stijl*, Theo van Doesburg also managed to maintain a Dada persona, "I. K. Bonset." As Schwitters writes of van Doesburg in 1931: "everyone knows the van Doesburg of the *Stijl* magazine, the artist of poise, consecutive development, and logical construction, but only a few know his importance for Dada" ("Theo" 275). Despite the fact that van Doesburg's Dada activities marked a great departure from his normal work and the *De Stijl* style of Neo-Plasticism, van Doesburg was attracted by the radical anarchism of Dada. Indeed, Leslie Atzmon writes: "although Dada and *De Stijl* philosophies were extremely different; one poetic and the other utilitarian [respectively]; van Doesburg and Schwitters found common ground – art and design's contribution to what they believed would be a new, universal world culture" (14). So it would seem that van Doesburg deviated extensively from his accustomed aesthetic stance when he took on the persona of I. K. Bonset and wrote his manifesto of 1923 "Towards a Constructive Poetry." Van Doesburg writes in 1923: "to take the purely utilitarian as the only basis of a new artistic expression = nonsense./ Utilitarian poetry/ Utilitarian music/ Utilitarian painting/ Utilitarian sculpture = nonsense" (113). Van Doesburg was signatory – along with Richter and Lissitzky – of the previously examined "Declaration" of the International Faction of Constructivists that asserted its independence from the International Union of Progressive Artists in 1922. This revolutionary group was influenced by the active participation of Soviet Constructivism in the rebuilding of society. Despite van Doesburg's participation in this, one year later, the guise of I. K. Bonset enables him to write: "there . . . exists a poetry on which one can spit: the utilitarian revolutionary poetry" (114). It seems that van Doesburg is able to digress so far from the ideals of *De Stijl* and Constructivism because he recognises in Dada's anarchic nihilism the potential for the rebuilding of a new society. Van Doesburg appreciates the struggle of Schwitters and Ernst to have their approach to social reformation taken seriously. Van Doesburg writes: "the new [Dada] poet constructs his language with the ruins of the past, and since everything exists only through language, he forms, in spite of "disinterested abstraction", the new man and the world with him. THAT IS HIS FUNCTION" (114-115). Van Doesburg, as I.K. Bonset, feels that the new utilitarian Constructivist art is "just art-syphilis" (114), and

that it is by “destruction” of traditional language concepts that the Dadaists are able to construct a new society. Van Doesburg obviously appreciates the alternative approach to social reform of his friend Schwitters, the approach of aesthetic subversion rather than political activism and utilitarianism. In 1923, van Doesburg, along with his wife Nelly, even went as far as to lead a disruptive “Dada Campaign” in Holland which further stressed the commonalities between Dada and European Constructivism. The Dadaists and Constructivists both shared the drive towards a Communist society, and European Constructivism, unlike Soviet Constructivism, maintained faith in the potential of art to reform bourgeois society without becoming politicised and utilitarian. Van Doesburg’s interpretation of Dada very much refutes Bürger’s notion that the avant-garde attempted an abolition of the institution of art. According to Doesburg it is through play with aesthetics that Dada hopes to affect social reform. The aesthetic subversion and nihilism of Hanover and Cologne Dada did not entail a socialisation or politicisation of art in the manner of Berlin Dada or indeed of Soviet Constructivism. The Dada of Hanover and Cologne did not entail a sublation of art into life, but rather a destruction of traditional bourgeois aesthetic concepts in order to build them anew, and with them a new society, since “Dada is a mirror in which the world sees itself” (van Doesburg, “Characteristics” 314).

(ix) Dada in New York: Duchamp, Picabia and Man Ray

Although Dada is thought to have originated in Zurich with Tzara, artists also sought refuge from the war in other neutral countries such as the United States. Exiled Cubist artists Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp left Paris for New York in 1915. By 1917 their activities in New York were parallel in spirit to those of the Zurich Dadaists. Whilst there was less of a sense of urgency about the works produced in New York, so far were they from the concerns of the war in Europe, Tzara was to recognise that their iconoclasm, mechanical imagery and use of chance was much in line with Zurich Dada. Picabia and Duchamp “challenged material and technical conventions as well as the social and aesthetic status of art,” and, together with American painter Man Ray, they formed the nucleus of New York’s Dada movement (Gale 97). With all three artists there was a new mechanical emphasis to their work. Picabia and followers of the trio increasingly used mechanical imagery

and materials, Man Ray interwove photography and painting, whilst Duchamp's work resulted in the production of the "readymade." The "readymade" was the introduction of the idea that mass-produced commercial objects could be considered as artworks simply "through the choice of the artist" ("Ready-made"). This was the Cubist use of fragments of everyday life in their collages taken to its logical extreme. Duchamp intended his readymades to be "'an-aesthetic' objects – objects free from potential aesthetic value – in order to guard against conventional notions of beauty" (Gale 100). Duchamp was challenging the very foundations of art that cited skill and uniqueness as defining qualities of a work of art. Also being exposed was the way in which works were automatically transformed into "art" as soon they were placed within the institution of art, in a gallery or museum.

In a very early statement of 1916, Man Ray renounces all art that has been put to the service of "the church, the state, arms, individual patronage, nature appreciation, scientific phenomena, anecdote, and decoration" (277). Here Man Ray believes that art must serve no external purpose, rather it must be convinced of "purpose within its own medium." The artist must uncover "the pure plane of expression that has so long been hidden by the glazings of nature imitation, anecdote, and other popular subjects" (277). This sounds very much like an argument in favour of *l'art pour l'art* and reflects the formalism of Man Ray's early years before he came under the influence of immigrants Duchamp and Picabia. Evidence that Man Ray changed tack can be seen no better than in his artwork *Object to be Destroyed*, an iconoclastic work of 1923, which, according to Dario Gamboni, can be seen as an aesthetic statement that calls for the "destruction of art for art's sake," of art as art (qtd. in Pusch 284). The work was a metronome with a photograph of the eye of Ray's lover attached to the swinging arm. The work was first shown to the public in 1932 and was eventually destroyed in 1957 by a group of students visiting a Dada Fair.

By 1917, Duchamp had submitted what came to be the most notorious of his ready-mades – a urinal bowl entitled "Fountain" – to the open exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York. Duchamp submitted this piece under the pseudonym "R. Mutt" and upon its refusal published an anonymous text, "The Richard Mutt Case," in May of the same year. In defence of accusations of

plagiarism Duchamp writes: "Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object" (252). Moving on from his Cubist roots, Duchamp wanted to attack the institution of art, to show it up as being inseparable from the attribution of artistic value. The idea was that any item that was displayed within a gallery or museum would automatically become art by virtue of the altered manner with which such objects are approached and viewed.

Consequently, if objects outside a gallery were viewed with the same aesthetic eye, they too could become art. As Duchamp writes, "the only [true] works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges" (252). By separating the institution of art from the attribution of aesthetic value in this way, art is sublated into life in the way that Bürger describes it, that is, via an attack on the institution of art. This is the concept of *l'art pour la vie* as against that of *l'art pour l'art*.

However, Steven Barley points out that we must be careful when interpreting Dadaist activities, and that they may in fact come within the scope of the *l'art pour l'art* rationale. Barley writes: "We may be compelled to say that Dadaism, perhaps, did not exist for the purpose of satirizing apparent rationality that was inhumanly destructive and defensively righteous. Instead, we may hold that the satirical impact of Dadaism was a fortuitous by-product rather than an intentional end result" (22). The notion that Dadaism can be interpreted in terms of art-for-art's-sake is tentative, though so far it does indeed seem to be only Berlin Dada that engaged directly with modern society, that actually managed to refashion art as an instrument of cultural politics and social revolution. However, whilst the Dada movements of Zurich, Cologne, Hanover and New York may not have produced works which so obviously integrated themselves into life, the collective intention to attack the established rationality evident in the manifestos of these movements would force a rejection of Barley's theory in favour of Bürger's.

Francis Picabia, writing three years on, in his "Dada Cannibalistic Manifesto" and his "DADA Manifesto" of 1920, mocks the bourgeoisie for its materialism, for its turning of art into a commercial product. Picabia accuses them of "loving everything out of snobbism from the moment that it becomes expensive"

("Cannibalistic" 316), and speaks of the fear of the Cubists that Dada will "prevent them from practising this odious trade: Selling art expensively. . . . Dada itself wants nothing, nothing, nothing" ("DADA" 317). In the same year, in an article entitled "Art," Picabia explains that "Art is, and can only be, the expression of contemporary life. . . . Forget the fireworks of beauty at 100,000, 200,000, or 199,000,000 dollars" (167). Picabia speaks of *Beauty* as representing the institution of art, as part of a delusional hierarchy imposed by those wishing to maintain economic control. By 1920 the First World War had come to an end and Picabia had come out of exile in New York and returned to Paris. Back in Paris Picabia then became a central figure in the Parisian Dada movement. In 1922 Picabia wrote an article entitled "The Genius and the Fox Terrier," in which he derides the "geniuses" created by the institution of art. Picabia writes:

The art schools resemble schools for engineers – engineers who invent nothing, but know by heart what others have invented . . . Thus certain artists seek to perfect, to arrange the work of men of genius; they diminish that element which might shock the public, . . . since the genius is always wrong to manifest himself with so much life and freedom that he frightens those living in hot-houses! And that is why the current "genius" is made up . . . (169).

According to Picabia the real genius cares not for membership of an art movement or for presentation of his work in a gallery or theatre, he loves only "his own liberty" and to him, "every jewel calling itself an *Institution* is a stifling prison" (170).

The following year, 1923, Picabia wrote an article entitled "Thank You, Francis!" Scorning the manufacturing of art by schools and its preservation in institutions, Picabia writes: "what I like is to invent, to imagine, to make myself a new man every moment, then forget him, forget everything. We should be equipped with a special eraser, gradually effacing our works and the memory of them" (171). Picabia is against the morality that contaminates art of the institutions, fearing that one day "we shall have a minister of painting and literature" (172). Picabia does not believe art should be static, that it should form part of a school and adhere to a particular style or cause. Art should not be preserved in a gallery or museum where it can acquire monetary value; rather it should be spontaneous, ephemeral, elusive and constantly changing. This state of flux took the concept of art away from any that had previously been known, and thus, for Picabia, as for the Zurich Dadaists,

“art,” to all intents and purposes, was “dead.” *L’art pour l’art* or *l’art pour l’argent* was to make way for *l’art pour la vie*, a form of “art” which would be sublated into life.

(x) Parisian Dada: Ribemont-Dessaignes, Breton

In the aftermath of war, Parisian Dada, unlike German Dada, was confronted with a victory that manifested itself in a “return to order” of the vindicated conservative culture. The post-war situation in Paris was far less conducive to the growth of Dada than that in the defeated Germany where revolutionary social change was being demanded. In Paris, alongside Picabia from 1919 onwards, was his most loyal ally, the poet-painter Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. Together, Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes introduced the mechanomorphic style to Paris. This was a style Picabia had developed in New York in which machine parts replaced those of the body in painting and drawing supposedly to emphasise the irony of man’s invention of the machine and the machine’s “quasi human (specifically female) qualities” (Gale 94). Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes submitted mechanomorphic pictures to the first post-war Salon d’Automne, some of which were incomprehensible to the committee who “hid” Picabia’s *The Carburettor Child* in a stairwell. Ribemont-Dessaignes published complaints which ridiculed the committee and other exhibitors and prompted further controversy. Similar tumultuous events occurred at the 1919 Cirque d’Hiver exhibition, after which Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes found they were able to ride the publicity and, by the way of assault and exposure, force their way into the Parisian avant-garde scene. Very quickly the conservative avant-garde of Paris became aware that developments outside the city held more clout than their own, and the Dada insurgency continued to grow, aided by the arrival of Tristan Tzara in 1920.

In May of 1920, Ribemont-Dessaignes wrote an article entitled “The Delights of Dada.” Here Ribemont-Dessaignes speaks of how Dada loves to disrupt the status quo and mock the establishment, to put “wine in the holy-water fonts, and margarine in the colour tubes of painters” (178). He laughs at the masses for believing in art and respecting artists and addresses them directly:

You are too fond of what you have been taught to like. . . . Beware of those who lead you. They are merely using your thoughtless love of

fakery and posing to lead you by the nose for their own gain. . . . You are afraid of no longer believing. . . . You do not realise that one can be attached to nothing and still be joyful. If the day should come when you snap out of it, Dada will rattle his jawbones as a sign of friendship. . . . Dada is very happy (178).

Ribemont-Dessaignes is courting the public, willing them to take a step into the unknown, trying to convince them that if they give up their idols they will be happy.

In his article “Buffet: Art? Not Art?” of 1921, Ribemont-Dessaignes insists that Dada is not just another school of art, and that though, in “rejecting Art internally, the Dadas secrete it externally,” this is not done on purpose but is merely part of the purging process. Ribemont-Dessaignes confirms that “Dada is against Art”, and calls for the masses to purge themselves (175). “Purge yourself forever” writes Ribemont-Dessaignes, stressing that there is “no afterwards,” no point at which art should be allowed to re-emerge and reassume its autonomous, commodified status (176). It does indeed seem, that for Ribemont-Dessaignes, Picabia and Tzara, “Dada represented the anarchic shattering of all constrictions, a state which could be self-perpetuating” (Gale 189). Others, however, believed that such a position was flawed since it would be impossible to continually shock committees and audiences. Dada would have to prepare for the fact that it would eventually lose its shock-value. Thus, there was a group of Dadaists in Paris for whom Dada was a liberation on the road to something else, though they may not have succeeded in fashioning that new conception of art the way the Berlin Dadaists did with their metamechanical constructions that went “beyond” Dadaist montage chaos.

At the same time as Picabia arrived in Paris in March 1919, a group of poets founded the French periodical *Littérature*. At its head were editors André Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. The title of this literary journal suggested a serious approach to its subject in keeping with the traditions of the discipline that paid respect to elder poets. However, once established, the journal became a hotbed of radicalism playing host to the public nihilism of contributions from Tzara along with Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia. Whilst Breton and the group surrounding *Littérature* had much sympathy for the nihilistic cause of Tzara, Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes, in 1921 it became clear that two different wings of Parisian Dada were forming. Breton and the contributors to *Littérature* wanted to pursue a

more positive programme which did not see Dada as the end of the road for art, but rather as a cleansing step on the way to a new type of art. By 1924 Dada had experienced complete disintegration. Since the events of 1922-3 suggested the death of the Dada spirit, Breton had managed to rally the majority of poets around his programme and behind his more deterministic approach involving the idea that there would necessarily be a consequence to, or a stage after, Dada; that Dada had been a necessary step on the way towards something else. Dada was later to be interpreted by the *Littérature* poets as a mere “momentary indisposition” (Gale 203). Breton’s approach would eventually lead through the “*époque floue*” (“imprecise period”) to the founding of Surrealism.

Prior to 1924 and the switch to Surrealism, Breton wrote three Dada manifestos which were first published in book form in Breton’s *Les Pas Perdus* (“The Lost Steps”). In “For Dada,” amidst such statements as “the obscurity of our utterances is constant” and “Jacques Vaché’s good fortune is to have produced nothing[;] . . . he kicked aside the work of art, that ball and chain that hold back the soul after death,” Breton expresses, for the first time, his positive interpretation of Dada: “We are not pessimists” (200). Breton could be making a simple distinction between pessimism and nihilism rather than forging a divergent path for Dada, yet he goes on to assert: “it is a mistake to assimilate Dada to subjectivism. None of those who accept this label today is aiming at hermeticism” (201). Yet, nihilism by definition rejects the existence of objective truth and Breton himself writes in his second Dada manifesto that “there is no DADA truth,” stating that the terrain of Dada is “doubt” (203). Gale writes that Tristan Tzara himself acknowledged the process of change from Dada to Surrealism as one of “transformation from subjectivism to objectivism, from the anarchic independence of Dada to the communal activity of Surrealism” (203). Indeed, twenty years on in the 1940s, Tzara writes:

Dada was born of a revolt . . . demanding complete de-volition of the individual to the profound needs of his nature, without concern for history or the prevailing logic or morality. Honour, Country , Morality, Family, Art, Religion, Liberty, Fraternity, etc. – all these notions had once answered to human needs, now nothing remained of them but a skeleton of conventions, they had been divested of there initial content. We took Descartes’ phrase: ‘I don’t even want to

know that there were men before me,' as a motto for our publications ("Introduction" 402-403).

In contrast, Breton's third manifesto reads: "there is no question of again substituting a group for individuals" ("After Dada" 205). Whilst Breton acknowledged his appreciation of the "marvellous detachment from all things, of which Picabia has set us as an example" (205), ultimately, he rejects it and moves towards accepting more objective foundations for social and artistic value systems. Breton rejects the primacy of the individual over the communal; that is, the validity of the individual view over the universal truth.

By the time of writing "After Dada," Breton has realised that Dada is not able to "maintain itself on the dizzy heights it had chosen to inhabit" (Tzara "Introduction" 406). Breton writes:

In the long run its [Dada's] omnipotence and its tyranny made it intolerable. . . . I deplored the stereotyped character our gestures were assuming and wrote as follows: ' . . . It seems to me that the sanction of a series of utterly futile "dada" acts is in danger of gravely compromising an attempt at liberation to which I remain strongly attached' (205).

Faced with the "funeral" of Dada, Breton resolves to "try, once again, to join the fight, as far forward as possible, although I do not, like Francis Picabia, . . . make a rule of hygiene or a duty out of it" (206). By Picabia's "hygiene," it is possible to take Breton to mean Picabia's steadfast adherence to "pure," quintessential Dada. Breton, unlike Picabia, is more willing to try out other artistic concepts in order to prevent the "liberation" of art that Dada had already achieved from going stale. Breton accepted Dada had had its hour of fame and must now be transcended for its struggle not to go to waste. As Tzara saw it years later: "It is certain that the *tabula rasa* which we made into the guiding principle of our activity, was only of value in so far as *something else* would succeed it" ("Introduction" 405). In 1924, Breton, making use of the liberation of art that Dada had provided, turned his efforts to Surrealism. Dada supplied "the germ of surrealism," as Tzara put it (402). If Dada could "only survive by ceasing to be," then Breton decided he would have to find another path to take advantage of Dada's *tabula rasa*. "The instinct of self-preservation always wins out," writes Breton ("For Dada" 202).

In "For Dada" Breton alludes to what Apollinaire qualified as "surrealist"

activity when he writes: “There has been talk of a systematic exploration of the spirit. It is no novelty for poets to abandon themselves to the inclination of the spirit. The word inspiration, fallen I don’t know why into disuse, was quite acceptable a short time ago” (201). In fact, new writing techniques had been employed by Breton and Soupault as early as 1919 in their seminal texts, *Les Champs magnétiques* (*Magnetic Fields*), which were serialised in *Littérature*. These texts were experiments in two major new techniques that were to set the tone for future works. Firstly, the texts reduced the importance of the individual due to their collaborative production, and secondly, they were the first example of “automatism” or automatic writing. This was the unrevised, unedited, non-punctuated, grammarless free-flow of the imagination comparable with “stream of consciousness” writing. At the time, the techniques of automatism and collaboration were not pursued, so as not to clash with the nihilistic struggle of Picabia and Tzara to break out of the frame of literature altogether rather than revise its parameters. Later on, however, when *Les Champs magnétiques* came out in book form, it became clear that the texts championed the genre of literature as much as they challenged its conventions. What began as an experiment in 1919 developed on the back of Dada into the basis of a movement that was to become Dada’s successor in 1924. This movement will be the focus of the next and final chapter.

(xi) Conclusion

To summarise, Bürger identifies Dada and early Surrealism as movements that “do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art but reject that art in its entirety” as they attempt to “reintegrate art into the praxis of life” (109, fn. 4; 22). “In their most extreme manifestations,” Bürger writes, “their primary target is art as an institution” (109). Dada, for Bürger, is “the most radical movement within the avant-garde” in its criticism of art as an institution, in its self-criticism as against the common system-immanent criticism (22).

From an examination of the manifestos in this chapter, it would seem that Bürger’s theory does not take into account all manifestations of Dada. Although Bürger at one point concedes that it is only in its “extreme manifestations” that Dada targets the institution of art, he fails to acknowledge that not all manifestations of

Dada rejected “art in its entirety” (109), and that they simply resorted to aesthetic subversion. Furthermore, Hans Arp claimed that the Dadas, whilst they wanted to abolish the institution of art, did not want to reject art entirely, which seems to turn Bürger’s theory on its head. Certainly, it can be confirmed that the most prominent Dadas conform to Bürger’s theory. Tzara did indeed call for the destruction of art, even though his activity remained speculative, stopping short of the political action necessary to abolish the institution of art. Huelsenbeck and the Berlin Dadas also called for the destruction of art but in an explicitly political manner, frustrated by the speculation in Zurich. The evolution in Berlin of the Dadaist technique of montage sought to engage directly with society and politics at the expense of the institution of art.

Beyond Tzara and the Berlin Dadas, however, it is difficult to find a strain of Dada that Bürger’s theory can be applied to. In Zurich, Janco claimed that Tzara only posed as a nihilist to “shock the bourgeois into paying attention,” Arp is horrified to be labelled a “nihilist” and Richter believed that Dada’s “total repudiation of art” was “propaganda” that was itself a “factor in the advance of art.” It was in dialogue with Arp and Richter that Janco developed the sociopolitical basis to his art. Janco joined the Radical Artists group and developed a positive, productive attitude to life and society, going beyond Dadaist negation. Janco explained that there were “two speeds” of Dada, the initial negative one being followed by a second positive phase, which still remains relatively unknown. Even in Berlin, where Dionysian Dada was extremely successful in its politicisation of art, Bergius identifies a second “pole” to the Dadas’ montage procedure which came in the form of the Apollonian metamechanics of later years – the aestheticisation of science and technology. It became clear that once the atrophying bourgeois ideal of art had been swept away and social conditions were equal, the “utopian dimensions” of Apollonian metamechanics were to take over where the Dionysian montage-procedure had left off. In a classless society it would be possible for man to be the master of rationality and not its object. Art was to be sublated into life until the political and social goals had been achieved and then it would once again be granted an autonomous status and allowed to return to its own aesthetic realm. Whilst the Dionysian pole was about chaos and negation, the Apollonian pole was about

positive, utopian goals for art. This is definitely an aspect of Dada that Bürger's theory fails to realise or acknowledge.

In Hanover, Schwitters identifies himself with the system-immanent criticism of Tzara and his followers (the "Kernel Dadas"), whilst he distances himself from the self-criticism of Huelsenbeck and the Berlin Dadas (the "Husk Dadas"). Schwitters appreciated that Tzara was still working within the realm of aesthetic abstraction, though Schwitters was not as nihilistic, feeling that pure art still had reformatory possibilities without submitting itself to the realm of politics. Schwitters is positively against an abolition of the institution of art, championing aesthetic subversion and the creation of a pure art of abstraction. Cologne Dadas were split two ways with some mirroring the Berlin Dadas and others inclined towards the way of Schwitters. The latter group, namely Ernst and Baargeld, along with Schwitters, can only serve to weaken Bürger's theory since they do not reject art *en soi* and remain entirely within the aesthetic realm, thereby further endorsing the institution of art. In Holland, van Doesburg, under the name of I.K. Bonset, accepts Schwitters' version of Dada, supporting the idea that Dada can affect social reform through play with aesthetics. Dada is seen as being "poetic" as against De Stijl's utilitarian style, which suggests that Dada's show of aesthetic negation was never seen as being more than a tactic and not as a goal in itself. From the manifestos of I. K. Bonset it would be impossible to conclude that Dada seriously rejected art in its entirety or ever attempted to abolish the institution of art.

In New York, Duchamp certainly intended to attack the institution of art with his ready-made *Fountain* of 1917. At first glance this looks like the perfect example to illustrate Bürger's theory – an an-aesthetic object placed in a gallery to highlight the absurdity that whatever is placed inside the gallery automatically has the status of "artwork." Essentially Duchamp draws attention to the redundancy and futility of the institution of art; and yet, Duchamp's criticism remains a criticism from within the institution. Unlike the Berlin Dadas, Duchamp does not go that step further and sublate art into politics thereby doing away with the institution. Duchamp had no choice but to work within the institution, since it is "only with reference to the category 'work of art' . . . that Duchamp's Ready-Mades make sense" (Bürger 56). Yet, from within the institution, Duchamp remained at risk of absorption by the

institution, of acceptance due to the gradual decrease in shock-value of the ready-mades. Bürger goes on to attribute the “failure” of the Dadaist sublation of art to the adaptation of the institution of art to accommodate the ready-made (52-53). Bürger does not acknowledge that this “failure” could have anything to do with the possibility that not all Dadas had such an intention in the first place, with many of them pushing only for aesthetic subversion.

In Paris, Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes strongly believed in the Dada state of negation and believed that state could be self-perpetuating with no need for a second Dada phase. This would indeed seem to be further evidence that gives credibility to Bürger’s theory. However, also in Paris, Breton and the poets of *Littérature*, whilst they had much sympathy for the nihilist stance of Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Tzara, sought a more positive programme which did not see Dada as the end of the road for art. Before founding Surrealism in 1924, Breton revealed his alternative notion of Dada, claiming “we are not pessimists,” and “it is a mistake to assimilate Dada to subjectivism.” What Breton felt in 1924, Tzara was to admit years later in retrospect: that Dada’s “*tabula rasa* . . . was only of value in so far as *something else* would succeed it” (“Introduction” 405). Many Dadas clearly realised this at the time, promoting a more positive programme to follow the initial negative phase. Dada’s overwhelming reputation for nihilism, however, along with the persistence of certain Dadas with such a programme, meant that Dada never really had a chance to fully realise its “second speed,” and was abandoned for Surrealism as a way out of the nihilistic trap.

In conclusion, aside from the writings of Tzara in Zurich, the Dionysian Dadas in Berlin, and Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes in Paris, there is much evidence to be found in the manifestos of Dada to show that Dadaist intent was often not in line with Bürger’s theory. Not all manifestations of Dada rejected art “in its entirety.”

Chapter 6 – SURREALISM

(i) From Dada to Surrealism

When Bürger states that his concept of the avant-garde applies primarily to Dada and Surrealism, he specifies that it is “early Surrealism” to which he refers (109, fn. 4). Indeed, according to Tristan Tzara, the starting point or “germ” of Surrealism was supplied by Dada, implying that that Surrealism was a continuation of Dada as well as its transcendence (“Introduction” 402). Tzara continues, “Surrealism rose from the ashes of Dada. With some intermittences, most of the Dadaists took part in it” (406). Presumably, Bürger is applying his theory to the Surrealism of the 1920s when he felt that there remained amongst avant-garde artists a belief in the possibility of reintegrating art into the praxis of life. By the 1930s a split had occurred between the commitment to political activism and a loyalty to fundamental Surrealist practices, meaning that “an integration of politics and art of the type promised in the “heroic” 1920s was never achieved” (Gale 305). According to Bürger, his theory ceases to apply to the Surrealism of the 1930s, since by this time the movement was no longer aiming for a “reintegration of art into the praxis of life” (22), or in Walter Benjamin’s terms, for a “politicisation of art” (“Work” 242). What remains to be determined is whether the manifestos of Surrealism support the interpretations of the movement’s intentions in both the 1920s and 1930s. Bürger seems to make little distinction between the aims of the Dadaists and the early Surrealists, equating their anti-institutional, non-conformist intentions, and their desire to create a new way of life rather than a new art, to “push the ‘poetic life’ to the utmost limits of possibility” (Benjamin, “Surrealism” 208). However, the Dadaists carried with them a post-war anarchic mentality that the Surrealists did not have in 1924. Tzara writes of the state of mind among the young Dada artists who went through the 1914-1918 war:

This war was not our war; to us it was a war of false emotions and feeble justifications . . . we proclaimed our disgust, we made spontaneity our rule of life, we repudiated all distinctions between life and poetry, our poetry was a manner of living. Dada opposed everything that was literature. . . . It seemed to us that the world was losing itself in idle babbling, that literature and art had become institutions located on the margin of life. . . . Dada took the offensive

and attacked the social system in its entirety. . . . It lay in the very nature of Dada to put a term to its existence ("Introduction" 402-406).

In the aftermath of the Great War, the Dadas could not see their way to positive action, the only things that made sense in the face of the atrocities were destruction and negation. The common conception of Dada froze it in this first negative gear, the "second speed" productive Dada of those such as Janco discussed in the previous chapter never being given a chance to develop ("Two Speeds" 37). In negating everything, it followed for the "true Dadaist" that Dada had to end by negating itself, it was obliged to self-destruct (Tzara, "Bitter Love" 38). For the "second speed" Dadaists, this led to a "vicious circle that it was necessary to break out of" (Ades 121). In the attempt to shed the nihilism of Dada, the "positive" Dadas, mainly in the form of the group of young Parisians centred around André Breton, found themselves forced to form an entirely new movement, and, as Dawn Ades writes, "Surrealism was born out of a desire for positive action, to start to build again from the ruins of Dada" (121).

The Surrealists never felt bound by a duty of negation as the Dadas did in the aftermath of war, and as some Dadas felt until the bitter end. In freeing themselves from the post-war mentality of Dada, Breton and his followers – including Louis Aragon, Philip Soupault, Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Robert Desnos, René Crevel and Paul Eluard – made the transition to Surrealism. Surrealism can almost be seen as a "substitute" for Dada for those who did not want to submit to their own negation (Ades 122). As a result, there was a certain continuation between the two "movements" which would suggest they shared many similarities. As Arp, a former "second speed" Dadaist wrote in 1927: "I exhibited along with the surrealists because their rebellious attitude toward 'art' and their direct attitude to life were wise as dada" ("Letter" 35). Arp implies that Surrealism inherited from Dada a hatred of the bourgeoisie and its traditions, its institutional segregation, and its rejection of the commonly understood notion of "art." The question is whether Breton's first manifesto, in many ways the lynchpin of the early movement, supports the idea that Surrealism attempted to integrate art into the praxis of life, in line with Bürger's theory.

(ii) First Manifesto of Surrealism

It can be argued that the Surrealist movement was founded as early as 1919 with the founding of the “Dada” journal, *Littérature*, in Paris. At this time Breton was already declaring that his poetry marked the “death of art (of *l’art pour l’art*)” by ceasing to be an end in itself and becoming “a means (of advertisement)” (“Letter to Fraenkel” 153, 155). Yet it was not until 1924 that Breton wrote the first “Manifesto of Surrealism.” The Surrealist use of the genre of the manifesto is rather paradoxical since the manifesto form is “a mode of verbal communication that supposedly owes its persuasiveness – its very *raison d’être* – to the reasonable clarity of its dialectical presentation,” whilst according to Breton, “language employed only within reasonable bounds is language misapplied” (Mathews, “Fifty” 4).¹⁶

Nevertheless, the first Manifesto was published in the first issue of the Surrealist review *La Révolution Surréaliste*, and generated such interest that many new young writers and artists, such as Antonin Artaud, joined the movement. The manifesto is interspersed with literary and poetic constructs, in the form of contemplative digressions and verse structures, which, for Marjorie Perloff, characterised the Futurist manifestos. Breton begins his manifesto by complaining about the reign of logic and absolute rationalism under which we live, lamenting the “incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown classifiable” (“Manifesto” 9), the impossibility of thinking outside the existing framework of categories in the manner of that which Adorno terms “identifying thought” (*Negative* 148). Breton writes, “under the pretence of civilisation, . . . forbidden is any search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices,” and he rejoices at the re-emergence of the unconscious, of “a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer” (10). Breton gives thanks to the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud for the fact that once more “the imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights” (10). It is not Freud’s analysis of the dreams that interests Breton so much as the emphasis he places on them, the fact that he gives them due weight when for so long they have been pushed underground to a sub-reality. Breton goes on to conclude: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of

¹⁶ Breton’s discourse on the correct use of language appears in his “Manifesto of Surrealism” (32-35).

absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak" (14).

Having stressed the importance of the dream state for Surrealism, Breton goes on to define the other major path open to Surrealism – that of "automatism."

Breton explains:

I resolved to obtain from myself . . . a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*. It had seemed to me . . . that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast-moving pen (23).

In this first Manifesto, Breton focuses on literary rather than artistic techniques, on the "fast-moving pen" rather than the brush, since this was his own field of work, yet three years later he did go on to adapt his techniques more specifically to the visual arts in "Surrealism and Painting": "I maintain that graphic as well as verbal automatism . . . is the only mode of expression which fully satisfies the eye" (84).

Max Ernst went on to clarify in "Beyond Painting," that:

The frottage process – based on nothing other than the intensification of the irritability of the mind's faculties by appropriate technical means, excluding all conscious mental guidance (of reason, taste or morals) and reducing to a minimum the active part of what has hitherto been called the "author" of the work – was consequently revealed as the true equivalent of that which was already known as *automatic writing* (98).

Initially, however, in 1924, Breton concentrated on his technique of "thought-writing" with Philippe Soupault, and together they baptised the new mode of "pure expression" by the name of "SURREALISM" ("Manifesto" 24). Breton defines Surrealism as:

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (26).

Breton also refers to automatism as the "disinterested play of thought," and together with the omnipotence of dream, bestows upon it a "superior reality" (26). Breton likens such unadulterated thought to that of children or madmen, to thought that is unrestrained by reason (5, 39).

In championing the "act of spontaneous creation" (Artaud 179), Surrealism,

in the words of Ades, “removed the veto Dada had placed on art and the necessity for the ironic Dada position; it gave the artist back his *raison d’être* without at the same time imposing a new set of aesthetic rules” (124). In line with Bürger’s theory, Surrealism did reject traditional forms and procedures of art which involved premeditated creation, it did call for a reintegration of art into life in its own terms of a resolution of the seemingly contradictory states of the imaginary and the real in a super-reality, but it does not seem that Surrealism rejected art in its entirety. Surrealism places a lot of value on spontaneous creation, on its technique of psychic automatism, and rather than subsuming this form of art into the praxis of life, it seems to bring life up to meet it, so granting it the status of super-reality. Whilst Surrealism might have had every intention of reintegrating art into life, without an accompanying negation of art and an entry into the praxis of life such an attempt ran the risk of resulting in its polar opposite, that is, an integration of life into art, a drawing of the real into the imaginary. Art no longer had to relinquish its autonomous status and assume a function to be considered real, it was the new reality, the new aesthetic life. The “disinterested” nature of the Surrealist technique would suggest an inclination towards the *l’art pour l’art* concept of art. This would be something akin to the “consummation of *l’art pour l’art*” that Walter Benjamin speaks of (“Work” 242), where life itself is being aestheticised and is now at the service of art: *la vie pour l’art* as opposed to *l’art pour la vie*. As Benjamin writes in his essay on Surrealism, “‘art for art’s sake’ was scarcely ever to be taken literally; it was almost always a flag under which sailed a cargo that could not be declared because it still lacked a name” (“Surrealism” 211-212). The name I have assigned to the Surrealists’ cargo is *la vie pour l’art*, whilst the Surrealists themselves might have declared it to be *l’art pour la vie* or *l’art social*.

(iii) Surrealism and Fascism

It could be argued that Surrealism gave undue superiority to the imagination, to the creations or fabrications of man. This is what Georg Lukács accused Expressionism of doing, of giving priority to the irrational at the expense of reasoned thought, which enabled myth to reign over reality and Nazism to take hold (“Expressionism” 76-113)). Indeed, Lukács wrote: “The ultimate form of

“Expressionism” was created by the . . . Surrealists” (“Realism” 35). Antonin Artaud, in charge of the Bureau of Surrealist Research, describes a focal point in Surrealism “where all the forces of being and the ultimate Spiritual veins converge” (“Letter” 179). Artaud continues: “Our Spirit stirs, watching for its most secret and spontaneous movements – those with the character of revelation. . . . The least act of spontaneous creation is a more complex and revelatory world than any metaphysics” (“Letter” 179). This can be compared with the spirituality of the Expressionist artists, with their desire to give pictorial expression to their “metaphysical vision” (Haftmann 1: 123). As Christopher Ryan writes, “Breton ultimately conceived of revolution in “spiritual” terms and had “spiritual” conceptions of a future re-generated society that would give birth to new conceptions of man himself” (67). Breton’s idea was that the awakening of true human consciousness and understanding would lead to the unification of the states of dream and reality, which would lead in turn to the creation of a “new” man, a more “complete” being. Ryan continues:

To facilitate and sustain the transformations that would bring about the “new man”, the Surrealists would employ new myths and emblems through the creation of new objects or beings in painting, sculpture, and writing. These new myths would be the foundation for a future society and provide a collective sensibility, neither particularly political, scientific, or religious, but addressing basic human problems that had been neglected by all previous erroneous systems of thought. Traces of this “*mythe nouveau*” could already be found in modern art and poetry, in the “poem-objects” of Breton, the collages of Max Ernst, [and] the paintings of Salvador Dalí. (82).

Indeed, in the first Manifesto of Surrealism, Breton abhorred the fact that “in the guise of civilisation, under the pretext of progress, we have succeeded in dismissing from our minds anything that, rightly or wrongly, could be regarded as superstition or myth,” and writes that this aspect of intellectual life, of primary importance in his eyes, has recently “been brought back to light” (“First” 66).¹⁷ Breton was to later make it Surrealism’s mission to address the absence of myth in modern society, which he felt had been a problem “ever since the reasonable and rational developments of consciousness took precedence over the passionate

¹⁷ I use an alternative translation of Breton’s *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme* where I feel it better conveys Breton’s meaning.

developments of the unconscious,” and he would go on to announce that: “the hour has come to promote a new myth, one that will carry man forward a stage further towards his ultimate destination. This undertaking is specifically that of surrealism” (“Inaugural” 455). This would fit in with the assertion of J. H. Mathews:

The first surrealist manifesto is not a programme for revolutionizing art and literature, but a programme that appeals for a revolutionizing of human values. . . . The [literary] definition of surrealism in Breton’s manifesto . . . is somewhat like the tip of an iceberg. Its real value is that it marks, above the water line, the presence of something of far greater proportions beneath the surface. . . . The message of surrealism owes its force to the spirit rather than the letter of its definition (“Fifty” 3, 5).

So, whether intentionally or not, the Surrealists’ rejuvenation of the mythical fed into the notion that Surrealism could be equated with Fascism. As Ryan writes:

French fascism relied heavily on myths. Its proponents conjured up a glorious mythical past based on ancestor worship and the “*pays réel*” or the “eternal” nation characterized by order, hierarchical elitism, and authority. [. . .] These myths were conjured up to betray and deceive a believing public by appealing to irrational passions rather than intelligence (78).¹⁸

Indeed, in 1940, Herbert J. Muller charged Surrealism with having inadvertent Fascist tendencies when he wrote:

In Hitler’s world, we cannot afford to pass over the obvious charge: although the Surrealists pride themselves on fighting against “all forms of reaction,” insist upon a ‘transformation of the world’ in the name of liberty, they are actually in the line of the most powerfully reactionary movement of the day, and chiefly exploit the dark powers that enslave man. [. . .] I do not see how the Surrealists can logically condemn [Hitler’s] preferences in dream and desire, or his efforts to materialize the great empire of darkness and unreason (549, 550).

However, not all historians followed this line of argument. Dickran Tashjian denounces Muller’s equation as “erroneous” (*Boatload* 190), and Amy Winter, in her review of Mark Polizzotti’s biography of Breton, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, argues:

Breton’s doctrinal and imperious personality, . . . and his insistent, indeed obsessive, pursuit of the “marvelous” or the “other” that provided escape from the prison, or as he once called it, the “paucity” of reality . . . are themes upon which other reviewers unsympathetic to

¹⁸ Ryan’s précis of Eugene Weber’s “The Right: An Introduction,” in *The European Right* (21-24).

Breton, Surrealism, or the French, have seized as ammunition to challenge Breton's significance, to elicit comparisons of Surrealism to Fascism, . . . without considering the historical implication of this judgement . . . (For all his faults, and they were many, only someone unversed in Surrealism could simplistically call Breton a Fascist or equate Surrealism with totalitarianism) (96).

Winter acknowledges the reasons for Surrealism's equation with Fascism – Breton's flight from a deficient reality towards the mythical – but denies a collaboration between the two movements. The implication is that any parallels that can be drawn between the two movements were coincidental, since Breton made his left-wing sympathies absolutely clear.

(iv) Surrealism and the Communist Party, Second Manifesto of Surrealism

In 1925, the French suppression of the Moroccan uprising finally pushed the Surrealists to assume a more openly political stance and commit themselves, in protest, to Communism. As Benjamin observes, it was “the hostility of the bourgeoisie towards every manifestation of radical intellectual freedom” that initially pushed Surrealism to the left, and the events in Morocco simply accelerated the switch from contemplative to revolutionary opposition (“Surrealism” 213). In the same year the Surrealists jointly published “Revolution Now and Forever!” with the Marxist, humanitarian group, *Clarté*. Cooperation with the *Clarté* group proved very successful for the Surrealist image, and caused Breton to consider an alliance with a political party as a way to ensure that Surrealism would not fall victim to the same sterility as Dada. Breton describes the years 1919-1925 as the “purely *intuitive* epoch of surrealism” which can be characterised by the belief that “*thought is supreme over matter*” and that the mind is “capable of freeing itself by means of its own resources” (“What?” 156, 157). In order to strengthen his “revolution of the mind,” Breton aligned Surrealism with the Communist Party, becoming an official member in 1927. Breton wrote: “Communism . . . has revealed itself as the most marvellous agent ever for the substitution of one world for another” (“Leon” 29). Breton describes the years 1925-1934 as the “*reasoning* epoch” of Surrealism in which Surrealists assumed the belief in the “*supremacy of matter over mind*” on conceding the “inadequacy” of their own resources (“What?” 158). In 1925, Surrealist activity experienced the “necessity of crossing over the gap that separates

absolute idealism from dialectical materialism [or '*practical action*']" (157, 156).

In their "Declaration of January 27th, 1925," members of the Bureau of Surrealist Research, including Breton, Aragon and Artaud, first declared their affinity for revolutionary politics:

We have joined the word surrealism to the word revolution solely to show the disinterested, detached, and even entirely desperate character of this revolution. . . . We say in particular to the Western world: surrealism exists. And what is this new ism that is fastened to us? Surrealism is not a poetic form. It is a cry of the mind turning back on itself, and it is determined to break apart its fetters, even if it must be by material hammers! (240-241)

The Surrealists, making use of dynamic political rhetoric, are stressing that although they are more concerned with a spiritual revolution than a material one – morals, aesthetics, and ideals are given priority over economics and production – they are prepared to fight for a revolution even if it must be by "material hammers." While in 1925 the nature of the Surrealists' affinity with revolutionary politics was still somewhat undefined, by the 1930s many Surrealists strongly identified themselves with Communism. In 1929 Breton's "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" confirmed the movement's commitment to the Communist party, steering away from the focus of the 1924 Manifesto on specific artistic techniques. Breton was keen to defuse Communist dissatisfaction with Surrealism which had occurred as a result of the failure to submit all artistic activity to political theory. In 1926, Artaud and Soupault had been expelled from the movement by Breton for prioritising artistic pursuits and refusing to commit their work to the Communist cause. Breton felt it was "vitally necessary that we not backslide into the literary and artistic sphere and be stuck there forever" (Conversations 103). However, just as Breton expelled those who did not commit to Communism, he also, throughout 1929, expelled those who did not show commitment to the Surrealist revolution, those who were willing to renounce Surrealist practices in order to gain acceptance by the Communist Party. In writing the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," Breton wanted to make clear that whilst it was necessary to have a level of political commitment in a time of totalitarianism, it was also necessary to remain loyal to Surrealist group activities and to have faith that Surrealist art was capable of revolutionary content and effect. In his second manifesto, Breton explains how he had to "defend Surrealism against the childish

accusation of being in essence a political movement with a clearly anti-communist and counter-revolutionary bent" (79). Members of the Communist Party were wary of Surrealism because they could not see the need for Surrealist techniques in the revolutionary struggle. The feeling was that "if you are a Marxist, you do not need to be a surrealist" (79-80). Breton writes, "with all due respect to certain narrow-minded revolutionaries, I really do not see why we should abstain from raising problems of love, dream, madness, art and religion, provided we consider them in the same light in which they, and we too, consider Revolution" (78). Whilst remaining optimistic in 1929 about Surrealism's potential for abolishing the bourgeois institutions, Walter Benjamin also questioned the movement's capacity to bind Surrealist "revolt to revolution," that is to weld the Surrealist "experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience . . . – the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution?" ("Surrealism" 215). Benjamin continues that in all its enterprises Surrealism focuses on winning the "energies of intoxication for the revolution" in the form of "poetic politics" (215, 216). As early as 1919 Breton had seen his poetry as a new mode of advertisement or propaganda, and as David Steel writes: "Just as the advert is a mode of persuasion, so surrealism from its very beginnings in dada aimed at conversion through public provocation and public demonstration. It set out to proselytize, to effect a change in perception, to modify behaviour" (295). In other words, Surrealism set out to induce revolution by a "changing of attitudes" as opposed to "external circumstances" (Benjamin 216). The Surrealist hope was that their art, in revolting against traditional aesthetic practices, would produce a revolution of the mind which would in turn provoke a revolution of the proletariat. Breton's notion of "poetic politics" differed greatly from the Communist Party's notion of political art.

Despite the movement's commitment to Communism, Breton would not commit to Communist artistic policy, since he did not believe in the "present possibility of an art or literature which expresses the aspirations of the working class . . . because, in any pre-revolutionary period the writer or artist, who of necessity is a product of the bourgeoisie, is by definition incapable of translating these aspirations" (155). Rather, the drive behind the activities of the Surrealists was the hope of resolving all antinomies by determining a certain point:

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point (123-124).

Breton's reading of Karl Marx and Friedrich Hegel led him to focus on a reconciliation of opposites in determining the major goal of Surrealism. In his essay "What is Surrealism?" Breton describes the attempt of Surrealism, in its second, *reasoning* phase, to "present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming *one*" (156). This final unification is heralded as the "supreme aim of surrealism" (156). Breton's argument was that the common roots of both Surrealism and Marxism in the Hegelian dialectic meant that Surrealism was innately conciliable with the ideals of Communism. Breton writes: "Surrealism considers itself ineluctably linked . . . to the movement of Marxist thought" ("Second" 149). Breton elaborates on this, explaining that Surrealist philosophy and Marx's dialectical materialism share as their common point of departure "the 'colossal abortion' of the Hegelian system" (140). The Hegelian dialectic was an idealist philosophy concerning the inevitable reconciliation of antinomies within the realm of logic, and was incompatible with modern materialism. Marx turned the dialectical method on its head when he combined it with materialism to form "dialectical materialism" and the belief that there is a historical force driving events towards a steady reconciliation of the contradictions that mark each epoch. Essentially, Marx transposed Hegel's dialectic onto material reality. Breton, keen to show his affinity with the father of Communism and thus allay criticism from the Party, writes: "*the dialectical method, in its Hegelian form, was inapplicable for us too*. There was, for us too, the necessity to put an end to idealism properly speaking, the creation of the word "Surrealism" would testify to this" (141). Robert Short is highly sceptical of the compatibility of Marxism and Surrealism, stating that even "if their position was compatible with the ideas of Marx and Engels, it was not so with those of Lenin" (21). Herbert Muller points out the glaring dissimilarities between the two *isms*: "Surrealism is a glorification of the unconscious; Marx invested his faith in rational analysis for the sake of conscious control" (548). André Parinaud also, in questioning Breton, asks: "was there a

logical bond or internal affinity between Surrealism and Marxism or were you just anxious not to challenge the largest organised revolutionary force?" ("Conversations" 104). Indeed, contemporary Communists were not prepared to content themselves with Marx's prediction that social revolution was inevitable due to the contradictions in class society. Even if they believed it, they were not prepared to wait passively in the sidelines, and militant Communism was born. The militants were convinced that an urgent overthrow of the social structure was necessary in order for man to be liberated. The Surrealists, on the other hand, did not conform to the idea that an abolition of class would be an automatic cure for society's ills (Conversations 97). Breton believed that "once a classless society was established, new causes of bloody conflict – that is causes other than economic – would surely arise" (148). They were content to work for spiritual liberation, to continue with the uncontrolled, independent "experiments of the inner life", within the existing structure in the belief that this would, in time, lead inevitably to an overhaul of the social structure and a shifting of power "from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat" ("Legitimate" 56). This was because, for Breton, "the world's real torment lies in the *human condition*, even more than in the *social condition* of individuals" (Conversations 97). It is true, however, that on being accepted into the Communist Party, Breton quickly withdrew his article, "Legitimate Defence," from circulation. The article had championed experimental art "without external or Marxist control" (56), but on acceptance by the Party, Breton found himself calling "first and foremost" for a social transformation of the world "at any price" (Conversations 97, 98).

In 1925, Breton had said he was ready, if necessary, to use "material hammers" in the name of social revolution. However, in practice these weapons were used to cause political agitation rather than physical violence. Surrealist protest came in the form of sit-ins, stand-ins, interrupting meetings, raiding newspaper offices and insulting authority figures; it always stopped short of militant Communism. Although, in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," Breton states that the purest act of Surrealism would involve "dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd" (125), this was perhaps just said to appease the Communists. In practice, Surrealist violence

remained on an intellectual level, designed to cause shock and pandemonium rather than to draw blood. Breton desperately wanted to maintain the independence of Surrealism by steering it on a course, as Robert Short puts it, “between the Scylla of assimilation into the art world and the Charybdis of absorption by the communist party” (15). Or, as Breton himself put it, “we sought on the one hand to guard against a return to our initial position, which stated that Surrealism was sufficient unto itself; and on the other, to counter any tendency toward putting an end to Surrealism as such, as a way of eliminating the frictions that kept its members from joining the political revolutionaries” (*Conversations* 103). Jack Spector describes the paradoxical situation in which Surrealism found itself at this time, at once fighting for independence whilst seeking a certain level of social engagement:

Surrealism became enmeshed within the paradox that its need for autonomy was inseparable from its need for engagement; for its very autonomy was a highly engaged gesture necessary for defending its freedom from totalitarian dogma, as well as from the conformism and rigidification of contemporary art, whether fashionable modernism or popular Socialist Realism (93).

(v) The Surrealist Object

The Surrealist object can be said to embody the story and aspirations of the Surrealists during the 1930s. The objects in question consisted of items found in second-hand shops, flea-markets, and even on the street. Any piece of “flotsam and jetsam within [the artists’] grasp” was recovered and then reinvested with aesthetic value (“Exhibition” 283). In the *Dictionary of Surrealism*, André Breton defined the Surrealist object, or “ready-made,” as “an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist” (“ready-made”). In fact, in the *Surrealist Dictionary* of 1938, this definition of the ready-made is falsely attributed to Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp, primarily a Dadaist, collaborated and exhibited with the Surrealists from the mid-1930s, but played a rather back-stage role, and remained silent with regard to his ready-mades until the mid-1940s. Duchamp was to claim that “the choice of these ‘Readymades’ was never dictated by esthetic delectation” (“Apropos” 141). The idea was that the objects were not intended as exhibition pieces but rather as experimental compositions designed to challenge and develop perception. For Duchamp, the idea of the ready-made was never about raising trivial

objects to the status of aesthetic works, yet, Breton, with his definition of the ready-made, succeeded in disengaging the object from its original experimental significance, and determined the reception of Duchamp's work, the *Bottle Rack*, in the 1936 Surrealist Exhibition of the Object at the Galerie Ratton in Paris.

Breton's thinking behind the Surrealist object, was originally that it would be the "objectification of dreaming, its transformation into reality" ("Crisis" 277). In his piece entitled "Crisis of the Object," of 1936, Breton writes:

The objects which form part of the surrealist exhibition of May 1936 are of a kind calculated to *raise the interdict* resulting from the stultifying proliferation of those objects which impinge on our senses every day and attempt to persuade us that anything that might *exist* independently of these mundane objects must be illusory (279).

According to Breton, the result of lifting such a prohibition is that "the object's conventional value then becomes entirely subordinate, in the eye of the observer, to its dramatic value, leading him to see it more in terms of its picturesque aspect and its evocative power" (279). The aim is to break down the barriers of art which "divide familiar insights from possible visions, common experience from conceivable initiation" (276). Breton then explains how the Surrealists will bring about "a total revolution of the object" by "diverting the object from its destination by attaching a new label to it and signing it, thus reclassifying it by the exercise of choice" (Duchamp's "readymades") (280).

Breton gloats at the "brilliant negation" that such Surrealist objects, "flaunt in the face of our accepted rules of plastic representation" ("Exhibition" 283). In doing so, it can be said that the Surrealist object situates itself "beyond the traditional artistic categories of painting or sculpture" (Harris 84). At the same time, as Steven Harris writes, the Surrealist object "participates in the logic of a scientific activity that would also be disruptive and revolutionary, as an activist intervention allied to (but not identical to) the activities of the political avant-garde" (84). Harris is putting forward the notion that the Surrealist object succeeds in securing a position for Surrealism that lies conveniently between the realms of art and politics; it leaves the realm of conventional art but does not completely enter that of the conventionally political. The Surrealists' political concerns, the struggle for a relation between action and dream, art and life, were less immediate and pragmatic than those of the French Communist Party at this time. Harris sees the Surrealist object as a model for

the “supersession of art” with which the Surrealists answered the Communist Party’s demand for political commitment in art, for the “politicization of the cultural field” (69). The object represented the substitution of utilitarian art with non-utilitarian, by means of removing the functional use of an object and replacing it with aesthetic value. For the Surrealists, it was the “uselessness of art that allowed it to be a means of knowledge” (70). The notion was that greater understanding of unconscious thought could prove revolutionary, and that, having won its autonomy, art should persist in self-exploration rather than becoming an instrument of politics. Harris writes:

To the instrumental use of art as a political weapon, the surrealists opposed a perverse, fetishistic object that represents a dismantling of the utilitarian logic of bourgeois culture, whose sexual content also exceeds that permitted in the usual (and sublimated) outlet for a nonutilitarian expression, *l’art pour l’art* (69).

So, the idea is that the Surrealists steered their course between the “Scylla” of *l’art pour l’art* and the “Charybdis” of *l’art pour la vie*, by clinging to the belief that they had found, in their “objects,” an “art that would no-longer-be-art” (4), which enabled them to maintain independence whilst simultaneously finding validation for Surrealism in the external world. Indeed, Breton himself confirms this theory when he writes of the Surrealist objects being exhibited in 1936, that they “manifest the perpetuity of the struggle between the aggregative and disaggregative powers which are disputing the nature of true reality and life” (“Exhibition” 282). In other words, the Surrealist object represents the struggle between those who want to keep the components of bourgeois society segregated and institutionalised, and those who want to return to a pre-capitalist unity of art, politics and society; between an autonomous art and a politicised art, between *l’art pour l’art* and *l’art pour la vie*, between the Scylla of the institution of art and the Charybdis of the praxis of life. The Surrealist object of the 1930s was artistic without being “art”; it was political without being “politics”; it was “*both* nonutilitarian and extra-aesthetic, autonomous and avant-garde” (Harris 70). The Surrealist object ensured the Surrealists’ “leadership in the cultural field, as specialists in culture who wished to bring an end to specialization” (Harris 70). Unlike the Dadaists, however, the Surrealists were not prepared to sacrifice themselves in the process, and whilst offering models of the supersession of art in the form of the “antiaesthetic objects,” were also attempting to

“delay a supercession” (Harris 144). This eventually led to their split with the Communist Party.

(vi) Surrealism and the Communist Party – end of a relationship

In 1932, Breton’s refusal to participate in the direct anti-fascist action of the Communist Party led to the Aragon affair, in which Aragon was forced to choose between Surrealism and politics. Aragon had wanted the Surrealists to set aside pursuit of the dream for the more pressing demands of reality, but Breton’s refusal to compromise Surrealist practice any further, together with his continued criticisms of the Party and its allegiance with the USSR, meant Aragon felt forced to abandon Surrealism in favour of the Communist Party. Other Surrealists – Luis Buñuel, Pierre Unik and Georges Sadoul – took Aragon’s lead and followed him into the Party. This very much highlighted the distance between Breton’s ideology and that of the Communist Party.

In 1935, as a result of his outright refusal to countenance a proletarian art based on the new Soviet artistic policy of Socialist Realism, Breton was essentially expelled from the Party. The communist-sponsored, anti-fascist International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture was held in Paris of that year and marked the end of cooperation between the two groups. The Congress was intended to promote Socialist Realism and coincided with the recent Franco-Soviet Pact. The Surrealists found that they were excluded from debate altogether since it was clear they would be opposed to such policy, and in response, Breton published a manifesto, co-signed by his fellow Surrealists, entitled “On the Time when the Surrealists were Right,” relinquishing all formal association of Surrealism with the Communist Party. Breton wrote: “We can do no more than formally notify this board, this association [the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture], of our mistrust,” and furthermore, “We can do no more than to formally notify this regime [of Soviet Russia], this chief, of our mistrust” (246, 253). Breton had come to the realisation that Surrealism was incompatible with revolutionary politics. In Breton’s own words, the event of the Congress “finally toppled the hopes that for years, despite everything, we’d had for reconciling Surrealist ideas with practical revolutionary action” (*Conversations* 139). The movements of Surrealism

and Communism had proved incompatible. As Gales puts it: "A gap opened between the commitment to political activism and the commercially successful face of surrealism, ensuring that an integration of politics and art of the type promised in the 'heroic' 1920s was never achieved" (305). Breton wrote that now the Surrealists could no longer place their faith in the Communists: "When it came to the expression and publication of our ideas about the world's social transformation, we were forced to rely on our own resources. . . . It wasn't possible to compromise any longer" (Conversations 140). Muller was later to accuse the Surrealists of holding onto the "hope of achieving ends without a realistic consideration of means" (550). Breton admits that even if Surrealism could have become more deeply involved in political action, "sooner or later we would once again have succumbed to the appeal of Surrealism" (Conversations 105). Muller feels that the Revolution was never so much an inspiration of Surrealist art, but rather, "a rationalization, useful for the inevitable manifestoes" (551). This certainly jeopardises Puchner's notion that the very existence of the genre of the avant-garde manifesto, a traditionally political medium, is evidence of the avant-gardist attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life. Muller's assertion would rather suggest that the Surrealists exploited the use of the genre of the manifesto in order to get noticed, gain acceptance and thereby ensure their survival as an artistic movement at a time when artists were being increasingly marginalised.

It would be tempting, at this point, to argue that Breton's alliance with the Communist Party was a mere pragmatic strategy, but in 1938, after he had been ousted from the Party, Breton, together with exiled Communist Leon Trotsky, wrote the "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art." Here, he confirmed his movement's continuing affinity with Communism and established conditions for art and poetry "so that they might participate in the struggle for liberation, while remaining completely free to follow their own paths" (Conversations 150). The Surrealist objects could be taken as examples of such work, along with the "object-poems" which combined the resources of poetry and plastic art (Breton, "Object-Poem" 284-285). The manifesto also explains the break with the Communist Party and serves to establish that Breton's left-wing sympathies went deeper than mere pragmatism. Breton writes:

If . . . we reject all solidarity with the bureaucracy now in control of the Soviet Union, it is precisely because, in our eyes, it represents, not communism, but its most treacherous and dangerous enemy (243).

Breton equates the type of Communism associated with the Soviet Union – the militant contemporary Communism being supported by the French Communist Party via the Franco-Soviet Pact – with the “regime of Hitler”:

The regime of Hitler, now that it has rid Germany of all those artists whose work expressed the slightest sympathy for liberty, however superficial, has reduced those who still consent to take up pen or brush to the status of domestic servants of the regime, whose task it is to glorify it on order, according to the worst possible aesthetic conventions. If reports may be believed, it is the same in the Soviet Union, where Thermidorian reaction is now reaching its climax (243).

However, despite the culmination of some strands of Communism in the “reactionary police patrol spirit represented by Joseph Stalin,” the next step was not the advocacy of political indifference as might be expected (246). Breton did not resort to reviving a “so-called pure-art,” but rather, he maintained the belief that “the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution” (245-246). Furthermore, Breton felt that true Communism, if it stayed true to Marxist theory, was “not afraid of art,” that it was only once distorted by contemporary militants that Communism sought to suppress free creation, seeing it as a threat to order. True revolutionaries of the left-wing, Breton felt, would uphold the independence of art in the service of the revolution, and thus his manifesto appeals to “all revolutionary writers and artists, the better to serve the revolution by their art and to defend the liberty of that art itself against the usurpers of the revolution” (246). Several years later, Breton speculated in his “Conversations,” that in the urgent call of the times, he had allied with the pre-existing form of Communist practice – “Marxism-Leninism” – when in less pressing times he would have adopted an independent political programme more in line with his own interpretation of Marxism. Yet, Breton added, “we had no reason [at the time] to suspect that its tip [that of Marxism-Leninism] had been coated with poison” (*Conversations* 105).

That Surrealism and Communism proved incompatible, is not to say that the Surrealists did not continue to push for a reintegration of art into the praxis of life. As Breton writes in “Inaugural Break,” “to avert the unlivable [militant

Communism] is not to flee life but to throw oneself into it totally and irrevocably” (455). True, Breton was anxious to preserve the independence of art, but his conception of the role of art was “too high to refuse it an influence on the fate of society” (“Revolutionary Art” 245). Where Breton’s view differed from the Stalinist politicisation of art – Socialist Realism – was that he believed “the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art” (246). Breton would not sacrifice the artist’s independence of expression to the revolution: “we were not prepared to devote more than a portion of our minds to rationalistic and disciplined activities” (*Conversations* 106). It could be argued that the politicisation of art, as Benjamin terms it, or the reintegration of art into the praxis of life, as Bürger puts it, necessitates the sublation of art and the artist into life. Without the sublation of art, such an integration of art and life becomes its polar opposite – the aestheticisation of politics associated with the very Fascist regime Breton was putting his energies into fighting. So, whilst the evidence would suggest that Amy Winter is right to ridicule those who equate Surrealism with Fascism and Breton with right-wing views, it is possible that the Surrealists inadvertently fell into an aestheticisation of life and politics, so strong was their desire to create a “collective myth” (“Political” 210). It was, after all, the Surrealist desire for a spiritual rather than a material revolution that brought the Surrealists into conflict with the Communist desire to politicise art. The Surrealists could never sacrifice art in the name of politics, and so their determination to be politically engaged led them to aestheticise politics, a practice Walter Benjamin attributes to the Fascists.

(vii) Salvador Dalí: Paranoiac-Critic Method

Indeed, accusations of Surrealism having Fascist sympathies started in 1934 and centred around the relative newcomer to the movement, Salvador Dalí. Just as Breton lamented the demise of the imagination and the irrational, so Dalí complained that “pure intuition, successively shown the door in all houses of the particular sciences, has ended up nowadays by becoming pure prostitution, for we see her surrendering her last turbulences in the brothel of the artistic and literary world”

("Conquest" 267). Despite Dalí's loyalty to the Surrealist side in the war on absolute rationalism, on February 5th of that year, Breton called a Surrealist tribunal to condemn Dalí for his Fascist tendencies. Dalí defended himself, claiming he was subverting Fascist ideologies in his paintings such as *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1933-4),¹⁹ but, as Robin Greeley observes, there is a fine line between engaging in Fascist logic for investigative purposes and slipping into a "dangerous fascination – even admiration" for the very thing being undermined (54-55). Dalí only joined the Surrealists in 1929, but was to have such an impact on the movement that he was to become a household name synonymous with Surrealism. Dalí was to be important to the Surrealists for the example he offered of an "activist thought that could truly grasp the world from a position of autonomy" (Harris 119). In place of the increasingly evident social ineffectiveness of automatism, Dalí introduced what he called his "trompe-l'œil photography of dream images," which, though criticised at first, proved to have explosive force (Breton, *Conversations* 121-122). In the "Second Surrealist Manifesto," Breton feels "forced to admit" the careless lapse into the "picturesque" by those authors not fully committed to automatism's revolutionary potential (157-158). In response to this dilemma Dalí presented his paranoiac-critic method which advocated a more conscious role for the artist via the "active production of imagery in the service of social critique" (Greeley 57). Dalí himself defined his method as a "*spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the interpretative-critical association of delirious phenomena*" ("Conquest" 267). For Dalí, not only visual materials, but all phenomena, were to be objectified and granted equal relevance, with "no distinction made between the trivial and the significant" (Finkelstein 278). Greeley explains that Dalí's method, first articulated in 1930, was "based on the idea that any given visual image was open to multiple interpretations" (57). Dalí then linked this idea of multiple possible accounts with his "paranoia-critical method" to produce an analysis of reality. In his article, "The Rotting Donkey" of 1930, Dalí claimed that anyone engaging in the paranoiac-critic method would realise that "reality" was not a fixed entity to which an individual responded but, rather, a construct determined by that individual's perception of the

¹⁹ Dalí, S., *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition*, 1933-4. Oil on panel. 18 x 24 cm. St. Petersburg, Florida, The Salvador Dalí Museum. Reproduced in Greeley (55).

world:

Theoretically, an individual endowed with a sufficient degree of [induced paranoia], might as he wishes see the successive changes of form of an object perceived in reality, just as in the case of voluntary hallucination; this, however, with the still more devastatingly important characteristic that the various forms assumed by the object in question will be controllable and recognisable by all, as soon as the paranoiac will simply indicate them (224).

Dalí claims that his paranoiac-critic method is intended to “systematise confusion and thereby contribute to a total discrediting of the world of reality” (223). Or, as Greeley puts it, “Dalí’s purpose was . . . to transform the Surrealist political imagination by systematising the manipulation – and disruption – of conventional perceptions of reality” (59).

In a large number of his works, Dalí takes Fascism as a focal point for exploring the political ramifications of paranoia. Dalí maintained a great interest, from the time of Hitler’s rise to power, in exploring the Fascist mindset through his paintings. Dalí appeared to have hit a Surrealist nerve with his *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* and *The Enigma of William Tell* of 1933, and at the February tribunal was castigated for his “counter revolutionary acts tending towards the glorification of hitlerian fascism” (“Salvador” 201). Dalí had also equated the bourgeois childhoods of the Surrealists with the background of the Nazi dictator. However much Dalí protested against accusations of Hitlerian intent, his methods, nevertheless, sought to demonstrate that reality is merely a psychic construct by ridiculing rationalist differentiations between objective and subjective reality. In such a way, the existing social order is thrown into question, and whilst Dalí claims that the undermining of perceived reality can serve to support Communism’s aim of destroying bourgeois institutions, it also supported the Fascist interest in myth creation. Whilst Dalí’s method could be used, as he says, to “unseat” existing social myths such as patriotism and patriarchy (“Letter” 199), it seems that its potential for creating multiple “real” possibilities could just as easily be harnessed in the creation of new myths at the whim of those in power. Indeed, as Haim Finkelstein observes, Dalí’s method of Paranoia-Criticism could be used either as an instrument for “unravelling objective truth,” or as a “mental construction forming a truth all its own” (276). Dalí’s paranoiac-critical interpretation of Jean-François Millet’s

painting, *L'Angelus* ("Tragic" 282-297), is the most ambitious and all-encompassing example of this method, exhibiting both the destruction of existing myths and the construction of new ones. Dalí took seemingly inanimate, innocuous objects, such as the popular and pious painting by Millet, and, through his paranoid vision, lent them a life of their own. Dalí wanted his method to succeed in "seeing things afresh or revealing certain truths from an unexpected angle" (Finkelstein 278), he wanted to show that there are infinite new ways of perceiving familiar objects.

In "The Tragic Myth of Millet's *L'Angelus*," Dalí "redoes" Millet's *Angelus*, creating his own myth which he terms "the maternal variant of the immense and horrifying myth of Saturn, of Abraham, of the Eternal Father with Jesus-Christ and of William Tell himself, all devouring their own sons" (297). In the process of creating his own truth, Dalí undermines the validity of the existing "bourgeois" myths, exposing them as just one of multiple perspectives and thereby "unravelling" objective truth. Dalí's passion for creating new myths is not, as such, what led Breton to suspect him of harbouring Fascist sympathies, for Breton himself aspired to "a notion of art which would essentially be myth-creating on a level free of specific cultures and therefore with an open end, leading to infinite provocations" (Balakian 153). Breton is more concerned with the violent and perverted content of the myths than with the fact that Dalí was master of all the Surrealists when it came to myth-creation. Surely the existence of the genre of myth within Surrealist technique is what draws it closest to Fascist methods, and Dalí's successful method of myth-creation, closest of all.

(viii) Georges Bataille

Georges Bataille, one time member of the Surrealist movement, identified two strands to Breton's thought, one of which led to advanced artistic expression in the form of automatism, and the other of which led to the formation of a moral and spiritual community. In the latter conception, "Surrealism serves a moral function, whose initial step is to call attention to myth, understood as what invests things with meaning" (Wiseman 198). Bataille, expelled from the movement in 1929 for criticising its idealism, felt that Surrealism focussed too much on developing artistic expression, and sought to address the "absence of myth" in modern society. Bataille

felt that the regaining of a consciousness of collective myth was essential to a functional society, and was what he termed “real Surrealism.” Bataille was writing post-Second World War, when one would think the culmination of Fascist collective myth-creation would have been more than apparent. Michael Richardson explains that Bataille did not make the connection between myth-creation and the events of Fascism: “Writing in the shadows cast by Auschwitz and Hiroshima – events which took pure utilitarianism to its logical conclusion – Bataille recognised the urgency that the ‘absence of myth’ served to focus” (*Absence* 25).

In the end, Salvador Dalí, writing at a time when the Surrealists needed to toe the line if they were to survive as a movement, was an embarrassment to the Surrealists with his overt interest in myth-creation and the Fascist psyche. The ambiguity of Dalí’s political inclination finally led Breton, in 1939, to expel him from the Surrealist movement, as he had done with Bataille ten years previously. Dalí, had he been allowed to stay, would have brought about the ruin of Surrealism. Indeed, Dalí, on his return to Spain after the Second World War, went on to form close associations with the right-wing, authoritarian regime of General Franco.

(ix) Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto or Not, Surrealism and Myth-Creation

Shunning all allegations of Fascist association in the run-up to the Second World War, Breton steered clear of Dalí-style myth-creation, yet, after the Second World War things proved very different. The position of Surrealism after the Second World War was one of despair over a deflated view of history. The Surrealists, placing their faith in Marxist theory, had waited passively for the “inevitable” triumph of the proletariat in the hope that a social revolution would aid their own spiritual one. However, by 1942 it became clear, after successive defeats of the workers’ movements, that Communism, the carrier of Marxist theory, had let them down. Already in 1942, Breton in his “Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not,” refers to the failure of the “emancipatory” systems he had made so many compromises for:

Many . . . continue to militate for the transformation of the world but make this transformation depend solely on the overturning of world economic conditions: very well then, system, you have me in your power, I gave myself to you body and soul, but nothing that you promised has come about yet. [. . .] What you would have me believe

is inevitable is still not in sight and may even appear to have been persistently thwarted. If this war and the many chances that it offers you to live up to your promise were to be *in vain*, I should be forced to admit that there is something a bit presumptuous about you, or . . . something basically wrong with you that I can no longer hide from myself (288).

Breton, in reaction to such disillusionment, decided it was time to begin the Surrealist quest for a “new myth”. Also in 1942, in his Yale lecture, Breton wrote:

The appeal to nondirected thought puts us in possession of the key to the first room. To enter the second, we must give back to man nothing less than the sentiment of his absolute dependence on the community of all men. But some have fallen so low that energetic remedies must be used (“Situation” 316).

Such “energetic remedies” came in the form of an “*intervention in mythical life*” (324), since Breton was now convinced that society could not cohere without a “social myth” (“Prolegomena” 287). The notion that there are two stages to Surrealism, the first coming in the form of “nondirected thought,” or automatism, is reminiscent of Bataille’s theory that aesthetic expression was only a passing phase on the path to “real Surrealism.” Surrealism, for Bataille, even before the war, had been about myth-creation, and now, Breton was prepared, not only to resume cordial relations with Bataille, but to support his “anxious desire” for a new myth. Breton only stopped to remark that Bataille was so “overcome” by this desire that he was perhaps too quick to consider the possibility that it is possible for society to exist without a social myth. However, now, Breton, faced with the irony of the pre-war attack of the Surrealist-turned-Communist Pierre Naville – “Do the Surrealists believe in the liberation of the mind before the abolition of bourgeois conditions of material life, or do they comprehend that a revolutionary spirit can be created only after the Revolution is accomplished?” (57) – conceded that it was necessary to revise the Surrealist focus, and, perhaps, that it was even possible to “choose or adopt, and *impose*, a myth fostering the society that we judge to be desirable” (“Prolegomena” 289). At the end of his Prolegomena, Breton makes his first decisive step on his quest for a new myth with his section on “The Great Transparent Ones,” based on Emile Duclaux’s idea that “perhaps there circle round about us beings built on the same plane as we are, but different, men for example whose albumins are straight” (294). Whilst the likes of Bataille and Dalí had already

explored the question of the extent to which a desirable myth could be imposed on society, Dalí was yet to find a suitable guiding myth. In 1947, post-war, Breton confirmed his belief that the time was now ripe for a new myth ("Inaugural" 455). Breton, let down by Communism, now had to rely solely on collective myth, previously compromised in the name of politics, as a means to assisting the spiritual liberation of man. In 1942, Breton had produced a catalogue entitled "First Papers of Surrealism" for the International Surrealist Exhibition held in New York. The catalogue featured an album by Breton, "On the Survival of Certain Myths and on some other Myths in Growth or Formation," which included Breton's "The Great Transparent Ones" and consisted of a series of poetic, analogical and iconographic confrontations of the mythical plane. The album measured the hidden potential and potency of the myths in question and invited the recipient to consider his existing mythological grounding. An inquiry published the same year in the Surrealist journal "VVV," "Concerning the Present-Day Relative Attractions of Various Creatures in Mythology and Legend" also addressed the issue of how to intervene in mythical life. Furthermore, in the catalogue of the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, entitled "Before the Curtain," Breton writes that the aim of the exhibition was "by means as it were of a spiritual 'parade,' to give an entirely external glimpse of what [the] myth [which it is our task to define and coordinate] may be" (367). The Surrealists were desperately searching for a "new myth" to supplant the "absolute rationalism" to which Breton and other Surrealists attributed two world wars along and the spiritual confinement of man.

(x) Conclusion

The Surrealist relationship with politics and society was by no means a smooth running, consistent one. When Surrealism officially began in 1924 with the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," there was no mention of a political relationship. Whilst there was talk of "solving all the principal problems of life" via a spiritual revolution ("Manifesto" 26), an integration of the imaginary and the real, the Surrealists were still revolving in the artistic realm and did not voice an interest in politics until the Moroccan uprising of 1925. From 1927 until 1935 the Surrealists attempted, in their own way, to politicise art, to synchronise their activities with

those of the Communist Party. During this time Breton claimed he was prepared to compromise art to the cause of social revolution, to support the “social transformation of the world . . . at any price” (*Conversations* 98), to sublimate art into life in line with Bürger’s theory. It was not until Breton was expelled from the Communist Party in 1935 that he was no longer prepared to compromise and lost all hope of reconciling Surrealist art with revolutionary political action. However, at this point Breton did not withdraw from politics altogether, maintaining his faith in Marxist theory and writing the “Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art” with Trotsky. However, a few years into the Second World War, Breton realised that Communism was fruitless, that the promises of Marx were empty, and that there would be no restructuring of society without resorting to the, until now, suppressed Surrealist practice of collective myth creation.

Essentially, by 1942, Surrealism was a movement that had dispensed with the attempt to politicise art, to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, thus throwing Bürger’s theory into disarray. Yet, Surrealism was not merely retreating into a *l’art pour l’art* concept of art, it was, it seems, taking “life” with it. Surrealism was not going to be content with having no bearing on society, and thus, its submissive relationship to politics having failed, the only option left was to take the upper hand and to submit politics and life to an aestheticisation. As Herbert Muller observed at the time, the Surrealists “are not art-for-art’s sakers or Dadaists, they do not have the fear of “meaning” that has obsessed many modern painters and poets” (552). Surrealism was now resorting to the “manipulation of reality” by means of imposing a social myth that fostered the desired state of affairs (“Prolegomena” 287). Surrealism, as myth-creator, post-Second World War, cannot be defined in terms of Bürger’s theory, but only as its reverse, the integration of life into art – that which is defined by Walter Benjamin as “the consummation of *l’art pour l’art*” – or *la vie pour l’art* (“Work” 242). Muller wrote: “In practice the Surrealists do not adjust themselves to the objective world but try to adjust it to their own dreams and desires” (558); “they dispose of the “flagrant contradictions” [between dream and reality, art and life, unconsciousness and consciousness] simply by suppressing the conscious” (556). Yet, it must be acknowledged that it is, indeed, only “early Surrealism,” pre-Second World War, to which Bürger refers when applying his theory (109, fn. 4).

Surrealist intention in the decade from 1925 until 1935 could justifiably be used to support the theory that the historical avant-garde attempted to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, in this instance politics. However, it should be remembered that such a reintegration entails the “sublation” of art, and whilst at times during this decade Breton seems prepared to make this compromise, the Surrealists, in practice, never completely relinquished their artistic independence and persistently refused to succumb to the proletarian art of Socialist Realism. Breton admitted that, even in a more favourable political climate more in line with the Surrealist interpretation of Marxism, “sooner or later we would once again have succumbed to the appeal of Surrealism” (*Conversations* 105). Such a confession somewhat deflates Bürger’s theory, the Surrealist attempt to reintegrate their work into the praxis of life, seeming, at best, half-hearted. In the end, Surrealism ended as it had started, and did indeed, as Breton had once feared, “backslide into the literary and artistic sphere” (*Conversations* 103). According to Adorno, the Surrealists’ failure to reintegrate their work into the praxis of life can be attributed to the fact that they were operating with “a dialectic of subjective freedom in a situation of objective unfreedom” (“Looking Back” 88). In other words, in a society that remained bourgeois, any avant-gardist attempt to reconcile the oppositions within that society was doomed to failure, or to a hazardous, “false” reconciliation.²⁰ Adorno would have agreed with Naville that a Surrealist liberation of the mind and of mankind could not be achieved “before the abolition of bourgeois conditions of material life” (85). Indeed, as early as 1929, Walter Benjamin, in referring to the “complete linkage of Surrealism to the outside world,” writes: “such integration is too impetuous” (“Surrealism” 212). The general feeling was that the conditions of society were not conducive to a Surrealist liberation of the mind, and that in the end Breton and his followers failed, as Benjamin had feared, to bind revolt to revolution.

²⁰ See Brecht’s notion of the ‘false article’, Adorno and Bürger’s notion of a ‘false sublation,’ in Introduction (16).

CONCLUSION

Written twenty-five years after Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the contributions to *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives* were compiled by Dietrich Scheunemann with the aim of providing an alternative approach towards a theory of the avant-garde. The vast majority of contributors felt the basic assumption of Bürger's theory was "highly problematic" and arose from a "restricted field of observation" (Scheunemann 7). The aim was to eventually "replace" the basic assumption of Bürger's theory by first exploring "new approaches" to a theory of the avant-garde (7). One contributor, however, Martin Puchner, did not feel it was necessary to replace Bürger's assumption, but simply to "reformulate" it in terms of genre, positing manifestos as examples of avant-gardist work that can be fully explained by Bürger's theory (117). Bürger's assumption, as has been shown throughout this study, was that the avant-garde intended to "reintegrate art into the praxis of life" via an abolition of the institution of art (22).

(i) Theory of the Avant-Garde: Reformulation

From an examination of the manifestos of all the historical avant-garde movements Bürger's theory of the avant-garde touches upon, I have come to the conclusion that Bürger's theory certainly needs to be reformulated, but that it does not necessarily need to be replaced. I would not advise a reformulation in terms of genre, in the manner of Puchner's theory; rather, I would suggest a reformulation of Bürger's basic assumption itself. The genre of the manifesto may have been consciously used by those astute avant-gardists searching for an instrument with which to assimilate themselves into the sphere of politics and the praxis of life; however, I believe it was also used by those who were not aware it had such potential and who were not attempting to reintegrate art into the praxis of life but simply wanted a clear and concise means of promoting or legitimising their particular aesthetic theory. Furthermore, if the genre of the manifesto *was* used instrumentally, it could also have been used in this way by those artists who desired a reverse form of sublation. Through Marjorie Perloff's identification of the overlap between

Futurist manifesto and Futurist art form (80-115), of theory *as* practice (90) – indeed, clear examples have been found of “literary [or] . . . quasi-poetic constructs” within the manifestos of Italian Futurism, the post-revolution Russian avant-garde, Dadaism, and Surrealism (82) – Puchner is led to the conclusion that the genre of the manifesto was instrumental “not only for formulating this project [of reintegrating art into the praxis of life], but for partially achieving it” (“Screeching” 116). I would take Puchner to task over the fact that if the manifesto becomes too “closely intertwined” with art forms, it can be argued that this represents an equally successful attempt to absorb a traditionally political instrument into the aesthetic realm, rather than the attempt of artists to enter the sphere of politics. The genre of the manifesto could clearly be used to politicise art, but was not always used with the intention of doing so. Thus, I do not agree with Puchner that the existence of the avant-garde manifesto “calls for a reassessment of Benjamin’s formula that fascism aestheticises politics and communism politicises art” (“Screeching” 129), since the genre of the manifesto had the potential to do either. Puchner does seem to acknowledge the dual potential of the manifesto-synthesis when he takes care to not to “pigeon-hole” the manifesto as art: “I would place even more emphasis on the manifesto’s distance from the aesthetic than [Perloff] does” (119). Puchner’s theory relies on the unfounded belief that the art manifesto always “remains within the sphere of political discourse” (119). In the final account, Puchner’s reformulation cannot be said to resuscitate Bürger’s theory.

As far as completely “new approaches” to a theory of the avant-garde are concerned, in particular those guided by Scheunemann’s wish to replace Bürger’s ideological theory with a materialistic one, I do not feel enough evidence has shown itself in the course of this study to warrant such an overturning of the established framework for avant-garde study. I cannot agree with Scheunemann’s assertion that “painters as well as writers showed little concern for the idiosyncrasies of aestheticism and the question of the autonomous status of bourgeois art in their comments” (19). It is true that the upsurge in the avant-garde may have been a result of a common challenge presented by advances in the field of technology, yet such an exclusively materialistic approach to theorising the avant-garde neglects to take into account the subsequent ideological intentions clearly expressed in the manifestos of

many avant-garde artists. Scheunemann's theory does not concern itself with establishing a common avant-gardist intention, and thus, to conform to the materialistic approach of Scheunemann is not to come into conflict with Bürger's approach. The former, although it may intend to, does not exclude the latter. It is most probable that only a combination of materialistic changes and ideological intentions can fully account for the upsurge in the avant-garde of the early twentieth-century. Thus, Scheunemann's alternative approach can complement but cannot be used as substitute for Bürger's theory. Yet, even within a theory that places equal weight on material and ideological causes there is room for argument. Scheunemann would be sure to argue, alongside Walter Benjamin ("Work"), that technological changes had resulting effects on aesthetic ideology; whereas Bürger, I am certain, would be seen arguing that ideological intentions preceded advances in technology, but that materialistic changes were the catalyst for propelling the modernist project into the practical realm and birthing the avant-garde.

Whilst I would side with Bürger in placing ideological intentions ahead of material changes – based on the strength of the evidence found that reveals avant-gardist concern relating to art's status in society – it is my proposal that Bürger's basic hypothesis must be dissected and restructured if it is to be of any use in accurately describing the intentions of all the historical avant-garde movements Bürger claims it can be applied to. I agree with those wishing to find a "new approach," that Bürger's theory is far too narrow and ideologically confining to be able to justify labelling itself a theory of the avant-garde. Bürger maintains that his theory can be applied to the French movements of Dadaism and Surrealism, the Russian avant-garde after the October Revolution, and, to some extent, German Expressionism and Italian Futurism (109). Cubism, it is acknowledged, "does not pursue the same intent" as the other movements, but is included in Bürger's concept of the "historic avant-garde movements," since it "calls into question the system of representation . . . that had prevailed since the Renaissance" (109). Having examined an extensive selection of manifestos from each of the movements mentioned for evidence of avant-gardist intention relating to the autonomy of art, I can confirm that Bürger's theory fails to serve as an explanation for many of these movements.

However, I believe that with a little adjustment, Bürger's theory can serve to

stand as a theory of the avant-garde that can be applied to the vast majority of historical avant-garde movements, Cubism, the pre-revolution Russian avant-garde, and late Surrealism included. In the course of my study it has seemed to me that Bürger's theory fails to be of use on three accounts. The first accusation I will level is that the theory is too extreme when Bürger claims that the avant-garde intended to fell the institution of art as it existed in bourgeois society (22). Whilst this may be true for certain movements such as Dadaism, Futurism, advanced Constructivism, and the Expressionist Activists of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Die Aktion*, such a claim is too extreme when referring to the non-activist and theoretical activist Expressionist groups, Surrealism as a whole, and the pre-revolution Russian avant-garde. Whilst those such as Malevich and the Suprematists intended that art should be reintegrated into life, they believed this would happen in due course if they pursued their purely painterly goals of abstraction as ends in themselves, and did not need to occur via a conscious and active abolition of the institution of art. The idea was that the culmination of *l'art pour l'art* would entail art's self-transcendence and its integration into the praxis of life (Cheetham 5). There was also a spiritual element to the aims of many of the avant-gardist working within the institution of art. Painters of the Expressionist movement *Der Blaue Reiter*, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, would have agreed with Malevich that abstract art could contribute to society and the evolution of man, without relinquishing its institutionalised status, by embodying the absolute and thereby being spiritually uplifting.

The second accusation is that Bürger's theory is too moderate for some of the avant-garde movements it claims to primarily apply to. When Bürger claims that the avant-garde intended to sublimate art into life in the Hegelian notion of sublation (49), this is certainly not the case for the Russian avant-garde movements of Constructivism and Productivism operating after the 1917 revolution. Whilst such a claim was certainly true of most other movements, Hans Arp stating that whilst the Dadaists wanted to abolish the institution of art, they did not wish to reject art itself, these Russian movements did not intend that art would be preserved in the praxis of life in any form whatsoever; rather, art would become a craft, a means to an end, and its essence negated as such.

Finally, my third accusation is that, whilst the majority of historical avant-

garde movements examined initially intended to reintegrate art into the praxis of life – be that as a sublation or a negation, or via the abolition of the institution of art or not – certain key movements altered their intentions along the way. Well into the life of the movements, both Futurism and Surrealism began to attempt the aestheticisation of the praxis of life, Futurism, Walter Benjamin would argue, as a result of its close relationship with Fascism, and Surrealism due to its Fascist sympathies. Furthermore, Barbara Drygulski Wright accuses Expressionism of a redefinition of politics that was an “aestheticization of politics” rather than a “politicization of art” (87). This assertion correlates with Georg Lukács’ allegation that Expressionism, in its false sublation of art, “paved the way for the infamous myths of Nazism” (Ratych et al. 5-6). Such accusations can, it seems, be justified when applied to the non-activist groups of Expressionism, as well as the activism of Expressionist Kurt Hiller, which Gerald Raunig labels as “proto-fascist” (4). However, it could be argued that, unlike with the later movements of Futurism and Surrealism, with Expressionism, such an aestheticisation of the praxis of life was, in the main, inadvertent.

Taking all these accusations into consideration in reformulating Bürger’s basic assumption would result in the hypothesis that the avant-garde intended to integrate art and the praxis of life in order to escape the “nexus between [art’s] autonomy and the absence of any consequences” (Bürger 22). Such a formula could apply to both movements which turned against the institution of art, and those which still clung to it; movements which agreed with a Hegelian sense of sublation, and those who cared not for the preservation of art’s essence; movements which intended to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, and those which intended to aestheticise the praxis of life. Puchner’s theory would also have to be modified accordingly, to result in the premise that the very existence of avant-garde manifestos is evidence of the avant-gardist attempt to engage art with the praxis of life.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that Bürger seems fully aware that his theory is of no use when applied to Cubism, late Surrealism, the early Russian avant-garde, and certain sections of Expressionism and Futurism, he does not seem to recognise that his theory might not always hold up when applied to the movements it supposedly primarily serves – Dadaism, Surrealism, and advanced Constructivism.

Bürger also concedes in a footnote that it is only in their most “extreme manifestations” that these three movements targeted the institution of art (109, fn. 4), yet this only seems true of Dadaism. The Surrealists were never quite prepared to hand over control of their work to the praxis of life, that is, to the Communists, breaking their alliance with the Party in 1935 when they came to the conclusion that Surrealism was incompatible with revolutionary politics. The industrial Constructivists and Productivists, as the most extreme manifestations of the Russian avant-garde, did indeed target the institution of art, but this was not with the intention, as Bürger’s theory would have it, of sublating art into the praxis of life, but rather with the intention of negating art in means-ends rationality, of replacing art with craft.

Ultimately, it seems that Bürger’s theory, in all its elements, can only justify calling itself a theory of Dadaism in its “positive speed” which entailed a Hegelian notion of sublation and was aspired to if never reached. As is evident from a reading of their manifestos, it seems true that all other avant-garde artists examined desired to have a closer relationship with society, to overcome the connection between autonomy and the absence of any social or political consequences, but some felt that they could achieve this through their autonomy, from within the institution of art. In other words, a vast number of avant-garde inroads remained “system-immanent”. In this sense, the distinction that Bürger sets up between the avant-garde and modernism is unfounded. For Bürger, whilst the Aestheticists were conscious of autonomous art’s social inconsequentiality, their criticism came from within the system, whereas the criticism of the avant-garde was “self-criticism,” levelled at art as an institution (21-22; Schulte-Sasse xiv-xv). The avant-garde must be distinguished from the modernist movements that preceded it by another means. I would say that the historical avant-garde represented the first real attempt to reach out to and connect with the praxis of life, whether from within the “system” or, at times, by attacking it. The Aestheticists, on the other hand, simply observed their distance from the praxis of life whilst they criticised bourgeois society’s means-ends rationality, even increasing their autonomy. Such a distinction between modernism and the avant-garde still places both within the system and equates them in the manner of Poggioli and the Anglo-American tradition. Renato Poggioli, who wrote

his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* twelve years before Bürger, subsumes both modernism and the avant-garde under the label “modernism.” I would not go as far as to erase the distinction between modernism and the avant-garde, but perhaps the two movements are not as individual as Bürger would have us believe. The avant-garde could perhaps be subsumed under the label “neo-modernism,” implying both a continuation and a transcendence of the modernist movement.

“It is not surprising,” Puchner writes, “that Bürger himself judged this [avant-garde] project . . . as having failed” (117). The goals that Bürger attributes to the avant-garde are far too ambitious to be achieved. Thus, Bürger is forced to conclude that the avant-garde project was a “failure” (53). In my understanding, it is this “failure,” along with the resulting conclusion that art must remain autonomous in advanced capitalist society, that renders Bürger’s theory so unpalatable to the majority of those participating in the search for “new approaches” to a theory of the avant-garde (Bürger 54). The belief is that the neo-avant-garde, not only of the 1950s and 60s, but also of today, has not compromised its goals since the early decades of the twentieth century, and is more than just a mere shadow of the historical avant-garde. In contrast, Bürger has to conclude that the goals of the neo-avant-garde are not entirely in line with those of the historical avant-garde, since “the demand that art be reintegrated in the praxis of life within the existing society can no longer be seriously made after the failure of avant-gardist intentions” (109). I think that in modifying Bürger’s basic assumption – thus evading the need to conclude that the avant-garde failed in its aims – whilst acknowledging that many avant-gardist ideological intentions were in direct relation and reaction to materialistic changes in the field of technology, it is possible to stem the quest for a totally new approach and to work within the vast theoretical framework we already have. Reading the multitude of manifestos produced by the historical avant-garde, it is impossible to conclude that the avant-garde had no ideological orientation or ambition, that artists had “little concern” for the status of art in relation to the praxis of life (Scheunemann 19).

According to Scheunemann, “it is the abandonment of the age-old spatial conception of the Renaissance in cubist painting, [and not] . . . any ideological project resembling the proposed intention of sublating art into the practice of life,

that marked the beginning and served as a constant reference point of the avant-garde's epochal innovations" (16). Scheunemann believes that the Cubists reacted to photography's perfection of mimesis, by calling into question the art's traditional system of representation and technique of linear perspective. This is not something I wish to contradict; however, if the Cubist move towards abstraction in art can be seen in the same way as Mark Cheetham sees Russian Suprematism's move in this direction – as "the purposeful integration of [art] with surrounding aesthetic and social discourses; in other words, its struggle 'against autonomy'" (5) – then surely Cubism can be said to represent one of the beginning stages of an ideological project resembling the intention to redress the relationship between art and the praxis of life.

I think that Cheetham's theory that it is possible for abstract art, as an end in itself, to be "against autonomy," for art to have consequence without becoming a means to an end, is vital to an understanding of a vast section of the historical avant-garde. Indeed, Marjorie Perloff claims that such apparent paradoxes are to be found "everywhere in the arts of the *avant-guerre*" (6). As Christopher Green observes, in researching the Cubist movement, "radical avant-garde status could go with comparatively conservative ideological connections" (2). Similarly, Shulamith Behr writes of Expressionism: "At the heart of Expressionist theory lay the paradox that the personal 'strivings' and subjective expression of the artist could nonetheless rekindle utopian notions of spiritual community and identity" (9).

(ii) Postmodern Prescription

The aestheticisation of the praxis of life is the reverse of *l'art pour la vie*, making it *la vie pour l'art*, but it is also the *opposite* of *l'art pour la vie*, in that it is, according to Walter Benjamin, the "consummation of '*l'art pour l'art*'" ("Work" 242). Thus, some might be tempted to argue that those avant-gardists, such as Malevich, who attempted to push *l'art pour l'art* to its limits, with a view to achieving *l'art pour la vie*, actually ended up in an aestheticisation of life, in *la vie pour l'art*. Following this, I am sure that those commentators with views such as Wright (who interprets virtually the whole of Expressionist practice as an aestheticisation of politics) would find it possible to argue, alongside Lukács and Raunig, that these avant-gardists were guilty of paving the way, if inadvertently, for

the myths of totalitarianism.

After the horrors of the totalitarian governments of the Second World War, and in the midst of the neo-avant-garde, Theodor Adorno wrote his *Aesthetic Theory* and formulated his prescription for the social mediation of contemporary avant-garde art. As has been explained in more detail in the Introduction to this study (11-12), Adorno, with the wisdom of hindsight, states: "All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function . . . are doomed" (1). By this Adorno means that in bourgeois society, all attempts to reintegrate art into the praxis of life result in the aestheticisation of that praxis and the possibility for totalitarian myths to take hold. As a result, Adorno concludes that art must remain autonomous, but understands that art will always remain dependent on society: "Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it its autonomy eludes it" (6). To elucidate, Adorno explains: "Art's double character as both autonomous and *fait social* is incessantly reproduced on the level of its autonomy" (5). The message seems to be that art can and does intersect with society, but only from within the institution of art. This can be described as the "internalist paradigm" of Marxist aesthetics which posits that "tendencies within art provide the main locus for social mediation" (Zuidervaat 62). Adorno's prescription appears to be resonant of Cheetham's theory of *Abstract Art against Autonomy*, the notion that purely painterly art can, in its retreat from representation of the world, actually connect with the world on a different level. However, since Cheetham uses Malevich's approach as a paradigm for his theory, it would seem unwise to equate Adorno's intention to Cheetham's. Malevich accentuated the autonomous status of his art in the attempt to integrate it into life via its self-transcendence. The earlier suggestion was that this accentuation was one approach that resulted in an aestheticisation of the praxis of life. Adorno is not advocating an accentuation of *l'art pour l'art*, rather he is recommending that the avant-garde aim for a balance between the autonomy of art and the reintegration of art into the praxis of life, between *l'art pour l'art* and *l'art pour la vie*. Adorno believes that achieving such a balance should guard against a regression into *la vie pour l'art*, into the illusory synthesis of art that was seen to lead to and sustain the myths of totalitarianism. Essentially, Adorno argues for the inherent social significance of autonomous art.

Despite the fact the Bürger judged the avant-gardist project to be a failure, he nevertheless criticises Adorno's aesthetic principle of autonomy just as he attacked that belonging to the history of art in bourgeois society; in addition, he criticises Adorno's understanding of social significance (10-11). Bürger feels that Adorno fails to address heteronomous art, and cannot comprehend art outside the institution, since he himself is operating from an institutional perspective. For Adorno, art's social significance lies in its content and import, which give expression to the social totality: "The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form" (6). Bürger feels Adorno is too dependent on the import of works for social significance, and points out that in the nineteenth century Aestheticists came to produce work increasingly devoid of political and social import, precisely in order to highlight the social impotence of autonomous art (27). Apart from its import, art, in Adorno's model, has nothing else to rely on for its social significance. As far as the social function of art is concerned, Adorno feels the function of art lies in its "functionlessness" and the resulting capacity to maintain that crucial distance from which to reflect upon and critique society (227). Bürger explains that Adorno refers to the function of art as its "functionlessness" because, although art can critique society by means of reflection, "it can no longer be hoped that art will provoke change" (11). For Bürger, the social significance of a particular work of art does not depend on its import, rather it depends on the potential of the work to eventually integrate itself into the praxis of life (should the right time present itself), in other words, to have a social or political function (whilst not negating itself in utilitarianism).

Lambert Zuidervaart, in his article "The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger," argues that neither Bürger nor Adorno provide a satisfactory explanation of the social significance of autonomous art, and attempts to establish an alternative account. Zuidervaart ultimately criticises both Adorno and Bürger for concluding that "autonomy is crucial for art's contributions within advanced capitalist society" (Zuidervaart 68). Adorno considers that autonomy is a precondition for truth in art because without this autonomy art loses the capacity to critique society and can, via a false sublation, become the harbourer of falsities: "By crystallizing itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing

social norms and qualifying as 'socially useful,' it criticises society by merely existing" (225-226). Along similar lines, Bürger concedes: "Given the false sublation of autonomy, one will need to ask whether a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all, whether the distance between art and the praxis of life is not requisite for that free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable" (54). According to Zuidervaart, both Adorno and Bürger view art as "an 'evil' necessary for some greater good" (61), and fail to realise the potential of heteronomous art to "challenge the status quo" and resemble "truth in art" (71). Zuidervaart finds it hard to imagine why it is necessary for art to be autonomous in order to critique society and provide alternatives to what currently exists. Zuidervaart's opinion is shared by Marxists on the German Left, many of whom dismissed Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* when it was first published in 1970 (Hohendahl 133). Adorno's theory was not the materialist theory of art that these Marxists were looking for. The demand was for a theory more in line with the ideas espoused by Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "The Author as Producer". In these essays Benjamin posits a parallelism between artistic and economic modes of reception and consumption. The expectation is that a transformation in "literary production relations" will be accompanied by a transformation in social and economic relations of production ("Author" 87). This correlation helps explain why Benjamin saw the mass media, created by advances in technology, as an "instrument of liberation," rather than as the "tool of domination" that Adorno saw (Negt 61). This was a theory of art that had faith in the ability of art to provoke direct economic, social and political change. This was a theory that saw art as re-engaged with the praxis of life; that expressed and promoted the socialisation and politicisation of art the Marxists had been looking for. Modern-day Marxists, it seems, also cling to the hope of a fully socialised art. Zuidervaart believes this could even take place within our capitalist society if the critical capacity of heteronomous art is recognised. Zuidervaart writes of heteronomous art:

The lack of relative independence could allow the work to present its challenge [to society] and disclosure in a more diffuse and accessible way, even though the absence of self-reference could derail this challenge and disclosure. . . . To claim that autonomy is a precondition for truth in art is to ignore the ability of heteronomous works and events to challenge the status quo, sometimes in ways that

are much more effective than those available to autonomous works (71).

According to Zuidervaart, the claim, shared by Adorno and Bürger, that the social significance of art ultimately depends on its “contribution to a utopian future,” must be surrendered (75). In other words, Adorno and Bürger are being asked to relinquish the notion that autonomous art, by constantly challenging the status quo, is working towards a time when the status quo will be such that it will be able to throw down the shackles of its “evil” institutionalised status. Zuidervaart is sceptical that this “utopia” will arrive, and advocates putting more faith in the ability of heteronomous art to keep a sufficient critical distance from its other.

(iii) Structural Development: Premodernity to Postmodernity

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas, member of the Frankfurt School and one-time student of Adorno at the Institute of Social Research, made his first contribution to German intellectual life with *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Habermas, much in line with Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s interpretation of contemporary society in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, charts the emergence of a “reasoning public out of the literary public of the salons, clubs and coffee houses of 18th-century Europe” through to its decline and disintegration (Finlayson 10). In other words, the evolution of a critical bourgeois public sphere as distinct from state rule, through to its reintegration with and state. For Habermas, the “public sphere” represents a foundation for a critique of society, that is, an “institutional location for practical reason” (Duvenage 12). This was the institutionalisation that came with the advance of bourgeois society. The institutionalisation of the “literary public sphere” was seen to be a model for a political public sphere. Within this new institution of art, all state and market laws were suspended, and public opinion was able to establish itself. Through the medium of public opinion, the institution of art, in the form of coffee houses, salons, and art and cultural criticism journals (Habermas 41), was able to “put the state in touch with the needs of society,” and thus established a political role for itself (Habermas 30–31). This new opportunity for unencumbered debate enabled the public to hold a “mirror” up to itself and identify areas of society in need of change (Habermas 43).

The second part of *Structural Transformation* traces the disintegration of the

bourgeois public sphere and its development into the modern mass society of the social welfare state and consumer culture. In the late nineteenth century, in reaction to the transition from liberal, competitive capitalism to monopolistic capitalism, defensive political changes took place that led to a shift from the rational discourse of the public sphere to a commercialised culture of consumption. By the early twentieth century the reintegration of the public sphere with the state was underway. This saw the de-institutionalisation of art, which, as Duvenage writes, meant the public sphere “changed from a forum of critical and rational debate to an instrument for the manipulation of public discourse” (15). Due to advances in technology, large capitalist co-operations were able to produce the mass media of that which Adorno and Horkheimer referred to as the “culture industry,” which was able to shape public opinion for political purposes. The public sphere had lost control of public opinion and thus of its critical function. This sphere, and thereby art, had become instrumentalised. For Habermas, the de-institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of art meant a de-politicisation of art in that art was now unable to advise the state of the necessary social changes.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s reaction to the culture industry’s creation of a “homogenous mass of docile and uncritical consumers” (Finlayson 13) was to demand the reinstatement of the public sphere, of an autonomous institution of art that maintained a critical distance from the state. Habermas, however, diverged from the view of Adorno and Horkheimer, at this point, with a more positive attitude towards the potential of an instrumentalised public sphere to critique, challenge, and change the social and political reality. This is a view that Habermas is not alone in. Zuidervaat, as has been seen, believes that heteronomous art is capable of keeping a critical distance from its other, and Benjamin, albeit without the hindsight of latter-day Marxists, was infinitely optimistic about the potential of “politicised art” to bring about a Communist state (“Work” 242). Benjamin does not feel the de-institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of art necessarily entails its “de-politicisation,” as Habermas at first fears it might. The lack of critical distance might in fact allow art to present its challenge and push for change in a more direct and effective way. In conclusion, Habermas feels that we must wait for a time when we can be sure that the instrumentalisation of art will take the form of an “instrument of

liberation” rather than a “tool of domination” as it became with the growth of the culture industry (Negt). Essentially, Habermas’ account of the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, although conceived in different terms and from alternative angles, parallels Bürger’s account of the development of the bourgeois institution of art, established to guard art against commodification and means-ends rationality, and its subsequent decline and disintegration with the onset of the avant-garde. Bürger’s notion that the avant-garde wanted to override the nexus between autonomy and a lack of social and political consequences is reflected in Habermas’ feeling that the cultural emancipation of the masses via the public sphere was a failure.

Habermas confirms his position in an essay of 1981 entitled “Modernity versus postmodernity.” Habermas writes: “All those attempts to level art and life . . . have served to bring back to life, and to illuminate all the more glaringly, exactly those structures of art which they were meant to dissolve” (350). Habermas refers to this failed attempt as the “false negation of culture,” and identifies a relationship between the over extension of one sphere of life into another and “terroristic activities,” citing as an example the aestheticisation of politics (351). Subsuming the avant-garde under the term “modernity,” Habermas seems convinced that, whilst the project of modernity, which aims at a “relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis” (352), has not been fulfilled, it should not be given up as a lost cause; he states: “We should learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity [i.e. postmodernity which is defined here as ‘antimodernity’]” (351). However, Habermas concedes that such a connection can only be established “under the condition that societal modernization will also be steered in a different direction” (352). Perhaps the strongest difference between Habermas’ approach and that of Bürger is that where Bürger judges the avant-gardist project to have “failed,” Habermas feels it has simply “not yet been fulfilled” (352). Habermas writes:

The work of Peter Bürger has since taught us to speak of “post-avant-garde” art; this term is chosen to indicate the failure of the surrealist rebellion. But what is the meaning of this failure? Does it signal a farewell to modernity? Thinking more generally, does the existence of a post-avant-garde mean there is a transition to that broader phenomenon called postmodernity? (345)

The feeling here is that, with the theorising of the “failure” of the avant-gardist project, the shift was established into postmodernity, and the accompanying negative perspective on anti-institutional art was assumed. However, Habermas feels that this perspective is misplaced, and that today’s fears about the consequences of art “breaking from the museums into the stream of ordinary life” have been aroused by postmodernist intellectuals. Nevertheless, Habermas ends his essay in praise of Adorno, perhaps acknowledging that, in the present climate, autonomy is the only option for art and that, if a little pessimistic, Adorno was left no choice but to lay down his aesthetic theory as he did.

In issuing my own prescription for the present-day status of art in society, I would be inclined to side with the more “pessimistic” conclusions of Adorno and Bürger rather than with those of Zuidervaart and Habermas. I would argue that once our civilisation has reached the stage of the mass media, we cannot regress to a pre-capitalist status of art without art becoming entwined with the media under the control of the state. Whilst, in such a condition, art certainly has the potential to become an instrument of liberation, at any moment, in the wrong hands, it can be used as a tool of domination and slide from an emancipating socialisation of art into a myth-making aestheticisation of life. Unless we were to regress in the field of technology, we cannot begin to retrace our steps when it comes to the position of art in society. Thus, I conclude that such a retraction of the autonomous institution of art is highly unadvisable from a liberal, democratic point of view. We should learn from the political and social implications of an attempt to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, and steer clear of acting on frustrations regarding the nexus between autonomy and a lack of any direct, visible consequences. I would not recommend too extreme an autonomy however, since accentuations of *l’art pour l’art* also resulted in an aestheticisation of life. I would advocate maintaining a balance between autonomous art and heteronomous art in the manner of Adorno: “Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it its autonomy eludes it” (A.T. 6). That is, the institution of art must be in place for art to ensure its critical distance from society and state. Yet, despite its segregation, art will never be autonomous in an autarkical sense, since it has its roots in and has evolved from its other: the natural and social world. Art may be self-governing, but it is far from self-

sufficient. Without its other art would not exist. Thus, as Adorno writes, art resembles society “without imitating it” (5). In this way, art can hold up a mirror to society in a critical exercise. Society would see its reflection not as an imitation but as a parent sees itself in its child. It is through an internalist “expressive causality” that art can have indirect social consequences (Zuidervaat 63). Although such an exercise might not have immediate or apparent consequences, a demarcation line between art and society must exist in order to guard against the type of direct social and political consequences that we witnessed on the erasure of such a limit. I would answer in the negative to Bürger’s question of whether, “given the experience of the false sublation of autonomy, . . . a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all”; and in the affirmative to his question of whether “the distance between art and the praxis of life is not requisite for that free space [Habermas’ ‘public sphere’] within which alternatives to what exist become conceivable” (54).

(iv) Surrealist Rebellion and Surrationalism

The “surrealist rebellion,” as Habermas pointed out in his previous quote, is generally considered to have “failed.” In reformulating Bürger’s theory of avant-gardist intention in such a way that it is not obliged to conclude that the avant-garde failed in its aims, and thus prove unpalatable to many contemporary theorists, Surrealism presents the greatest challenge. Surrealism, as one of the most extreme manifestations of the historical avant-garde, cannot be ignored in such a reformulation. The difficulty lies not so much in encompassing both early and late Surrealism, as it does for Bürger, but in the fact that Surrealism extends beyond the field of art into that of psychology. André Breton writes: “It becomes necessary for surrealism to be accompanied by a *surrationalism* which will act simultaneously as a stimulant and a restraining influence.” Surrationalism defines a whole “mode of thought involving the continuous assimilation of the irrational,” and “lends additional immediacy and force to the word ‘surrealism,’ whose acception hitherto remained strictly confined to the world of art” (“Crisis” 276). For Breton, Surrationalism is related to Rationalism as Surrealism is to Realism.

A redefinition of Bürger’s theory that explains avant-gardist intention solely in terms of its designs on its own status within the praxis of life is to overlook the

intention of Surrealist philosophy to extend its work out of the field of aesthetics and into that of epistemology. The phenomenologist and Surrealist poet, Gaston Bachelard, gives an explanation of the role of Surrealism in his 1935 essay of the same name:

Where then, lies the duty of surrealism? It is to take over those formulas, well purged and economically ordered by the logicians, and recharge them psychologically, put them back into motion and into life ... In teaching a revolution of reason, one would multiply the reasons for spiritual revolutions (113).

This is more than just the renewal of the Surrealist's relationship with the praxis of life, it is the establishment of a new relationship between the psyche and the praxis of life; it is also the encroachment of art on another institution of bourgeois society. This is an aestheticisation not just of life, as might have been attempted by the Surrealists, but of the understanding; it is the avant-garde as fully intended myth-maker.

My reformulation of Bürger's theory stands as follows: The avant-garde attempted to redress the inconsequential relationship between art and the praxis of life. If the revised theory stands as it does, it certainly fails to account for any attempt to redress the relationship between art and psychology, aesthetics and epistemology, or that between psychology and the praxis of life. Nevertheless, whilst the theory is perhaps at its weakest when applied to Surrealism, it cannot be altered since it must serve to provide a broad understanding of all movements of the historical avant-garde. Such a theory of the avant-garde is only useful up to a point, so diverse is the phenomenon that was the historical avant-garde, and would have to be accompanied by individual theories, covering each movement, which can afford to be more specific. Bürger's theory compromises itself in its desire to be specific, but not to such an extent that I feel it needs to be fully replaced, since it retains elements of the general within the specific. Furthermore, any theory that encompassed the Surrealist attempt to redress art's relationship with the theory of knowledge would be obliged to conclude that such a project resulted in failure. The Surrealists' interest in myth-creation, inspired by Dalí, only fully developed after the Second World War once moves were already being made to reassert the institution of art amidst increased awareness of the myths created by an aestheticisation of politics and society.

(v) Final Conclusion and Prospects

Whilst the social and political consequences of avant-gardist intention are of interest, ultimately this study has been an attempt to determine avant-gardist intention through an exploration of the historical avant-garde manifestos, with a view to testing Bürger's theory of the avant-garde. It is my conclusion that the avant-garde intended and attempted to redress that inconsequential relationship between art and life that the aestheticists had identified before them. Edgar Lohner describes such a goal as the "coordination of artistic and social progress" (116). In this sense, the avant-garde was both a continuation and a transcendence of modernism; it was neo-modernism, lying somewhere in-between where it is positioned by Bürger, on the one hand, and Poggioli on the other. This conclusion regarding avant-gardist intention towards the autonomous status of art contributes to the present-day quest for a new theory of the avant-garde that overturns Bürger's longstanding one. However, such a conclusion would suggest that Bürger's theory does not need to be overturned, but merely reformulated so as to cover all the principal movements of the historical avant-garde and their subdivisions.

Neglected by the contributors to Scheunemann's project to "overturn" our understanding of the avant-garde, but deserving of consideration at this final stage, is another theorist who attempts to "revise" Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. In *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, published at the turn of the century, Richard Murphy confirms my classing of the avant-garde as neo-modernist. Murphy, feeling that Expressionism is the movement most neglected by Bürger, writes:

The overlap [of modernist and avant-garde tendencies found in German expressionism] is . . . significant. For the various contradictory impulses within expressionism illustrate that the avant-garde is a much more ambiguous and heterogeneous phenomenon than Bürger – with his narrow focus on dada and surrealism – would sometimes have us believe (3).

Rather than clearly demarcating between modernism and avant-gardism as Bürger does, Murphy feels that the avant-garde "serves as the political and revolutionary cutting edge of the broader movements of modernism, from which it frequently appears with difficulty to free itself" (3). In re-reading German Expressionism through Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, as I have done in Chapter One, Murphy

comes to the conclusion that the theory needs reformulating, and proposes certain revisions which also describe some of the features of Expressionism. It will be interesting to determine, before concluding, whether the revisions of Murphy correlate with the three flaws I have identified in Bürger's theory. In reformulating the *Theory of the Avant-Garde* at the start of this chapter, I levelled three accusations at Bürger. These accusations were in relation to: [1] the inclusion of the attempt to abolish the institution of art; [2] the restricted notion of sublation; and [3] the overlooking of the false sublation of art. In comparison, Murphy proposes a revision of: [1] the ambiguity with regard to "aesthetic autonomy" (26); [2] the missing category of "de-aestheticized autonomous art" (31); and [3] the overlooking of the "idealist" sublation of art and life and the "false reconciliation of real contradictions" (34, 37).

It appears that Murphy's first revision correlates, to a certain extent, to my second accusation. I accused Bürger of not accounting for sections of the avant-garde which attempted an un-Hegelian notion of sublation. Murphy complains that Bürger's use of the concept of "sublation/Aufhebung" is problematic and unclear, and that, in whichever sense it is understood, it does not acknowledge "other forms of 'engagement' in art" (27). Murphy feels that if sublation is understood as the "attempt to instrumentalize art," and a commitment "*exclusively* to extra-aesthetic goals" (42), then this leads to a "fundamental ambiguity with regard to the category of aesthetic autonomy," since the avant-garde would lose the critical capacity of art (27). Murphy does not seem to have picked up on Bürger's explanation that sublation is to be taken in the Hegelian sense of the term, but he is right to object to the singular approach to engagement in art.

As for Murphy's second revision, I would argue that it corresponds, to a degree, with my first accusation. I accused Bürger of branding the avant-garde with the intention of abolishing the institution of art, when this only holds true for a very select few movements. Murphy, on this point, argues that Bürger's "theoretical framework . . . [is] in need of a [further] term: de-aestheticized autonomous art" (32). Murphy explains that such a category would refer to those movements which have "simultaneously negated the aura of affirmation characteristic of art for art's sake, while remaining consistent with the 'modern' requirement of aesthetic autonomy"

(32). In my mind such a category would apply to those movements I mentioned which did not attempt a destruction of the institution of art, thus meeting the “modern” requirement, but which nevertheless argued for an increased engagement with life, such as Surrealism, the pre-Revolution avant-garde, and groups within Expressionism (for Murphy: the “Romantic” and “Idealist” avant-gardes along with the theoretical Activists such as Kurt Hiller). This is Cheetham’s notion of abstract art against autonomy. It is, as Murphy puts it, the concept of “an autonomous and yet entirely critical form of discourse” (41).

Finally, I would say that there is a considerable correlation between Murphy’s third revision and my final accusation. I faulted Bürger for ignoring the possibility that some avant-garde movements actually intended to integrate life into art as opposed to reintegrating art into the praxis of life. That is, an aestheticisation of life as opposed to a socialisation of art. Murphy, in line with this, identifies two ways in which art and life can be brought together: firstly, “art may serve as an *ideal* model for life: it can offer . . . a utopian pattern for the way in which the chaotic, violent or tragic aspects of life may be ‘mastered’ by the form of the work of art, so that in this way the mundane world is ‘sublimated’ or raised up to the sublime and ideal level of the aesthetic sphere” (34); secondly, art may be brought “down to the banal level of reality” in what Murphy terms a “‘cynical’ sublation of art and life” (34). For Murphy, the latter notion of the bringing together of art and life applies to the “historical” avant-garde; the former notion applies to an earlier version of the avant-garde – the “‘idealist’ avant-garde of the early nineteenth century” (37) – and not, as one might imagine, to an “idealist” wing of the “historical” avant-garde.²¹ Murphy is suggesting a reformulation of Bürger’s theory that would encompass the intentions of previous avant-gardes, and thus argues that a distinction needs to be made between those avant-gardists who attempted to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, and those who intended to implement the “sublimation” of everyday life. Such a distinction could just as easily be called for – as I do – within the scope of the historical avant-garde. Indeed, Murphy even goes on to recognise that

²¹ Murphy takes this distinction between the “idealist” and “historical” avant-gardes from Edgar Lohner’s “Die Problematik des Begriffs der Avantgarde” and Manfred Hardt’s “Zu Begriff, Geschichte und Theorie der literarischen Avantgarde,” reprinted in Hardt’s *Literarische Avantgarden* (113-127, 145-171).

“Expressionism is clearly caught between these diametrically opposed conceptions of the avant-garde” (38).

It would seem that, whilst there are differences in historical understanding, my reformulation corresponds to Murphy’s to a considerable extent, though I would never recommend a reformulation of Bürger’s theory with a view to encompassing all “previous avant-gardes.” Expressionism alone – as Murphy’s “ideal example with which to test Bürger’s theses” (5) – does indeed seem to encompass all the variants of avant-gardist intention I have identified (with the exception of the designs of Surrealism on psychology). However, I think that my study gains strength from its extensive analysis of all the principal movements of the historical avant-garde and its focus on manifestos in determining avant-gardist intention. The extent and conclusions of this study should clarify and lend more weight to Murphy’s revisions of Bürger’s theory, and will perhaps compel those involved in the current thirst for revision to consider the possibility that Bürger’s theory need only be reformulated, rather than replaced, for it to encompass all the movements it aims to apply to.

I am sure, that, as with every hypothesis, my reformulation of Bürger’s theory will provoke debate. It is my hope that such debate will generate new attitudes and approaches towards a revised theory of the historical avant-garde. Furthermore, the extensive analyses undertaken in the foregoing chapters should be of use to others in determining their own conclusions with regard to avant-gardist intention. Some may wish to go further and engage with the slippage between declared intentions (the manifesto) and artistic practice. It would also be complementary to undertake a full literary analysis of the manifestos to reveal how different styles can reflect or conflict with artists’ proclaimed intentions towards the autonomous status of art. A final suggestion for further study would be the comparison of the intentions revealed in the manifestos examined with those of the post-war neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s. Was the approach of the neo-avant-garde in line with Adorno’s postmodern prescription for art?

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